

## Under the Guise of Science

Ivo Barbieri

Translated by Talía Guzmán-González

**Abstract.** In *Dom Casmurro*, Machado ironizes the penchant for romanticism, the tragic, and the pathetic in Brazilian culture. He gives a burlesque modulation to Flaubert's narrative tradition, which this study contrasts with some European variants of this deconstruction—Nietzsche, Kafka, and Musil. The detached point of view and the burlesque sarcasm of the enunciation belong to the anti-tragic current in the Portuguese-Brazilian tradition.

Semi-science is a despot such as has never been in the world before.

—Dostoyevsky: *The Possessed*, 1871

Judgment is now a probability, a possibility, a hypothesis.

—Machado de Assis: *A semana*, 31/5/1896

Initially published as a series (*folhetim*) in the quarterly journal *A estação* (15 Oct. 1881-15 March 1882), "The Psychiatrist," was published afterwards as the first and longest narrative in *Papéis avulsos* (1882).<sup>1</sup> If it caused much surprise in its first edition due to the fact that a highly elaborated literary text was published in fifteen issues in a mundane publication dedicated primarily to women's fashion, the later publication in book form was not less so. The peculiarity had to do not only with the length but also with the structure of the composition, which, in combining historical times and spaces, diverse themes and plots, can be better defined as a novella than a short story—although the term short story is indeed the appropriate denomination for the

other texts included in the collection. A contemporary critic recognized in *Papéis avulsos* “a continuation in the essence and morality, of the form initiated in *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas* (1881)” (Rosa 140).<sup>2</sup> This statement suggests that the texts in that collection correspond, in the genre of short story, to the qualitative shift in the novel the previous year. Nevertheless, considering the innovation of the composition, the range of meanings, and the versatility of the language registers that separate *Papéis avulsos* (1882) from *Histórias da meia noite* (1873), and confronting the fictional horizon of *Iaiá Garcia* (1878) with the world of *Brás Cubas*, the rupture in the line of the short story is even more spectacular than the one in the novel. However, it is important to remember that there are only two years between the fourth and fifth novels, while there is almost a decade between the second and the third book of short stories. The bigger impact caused by *Posthumous Memoirs* is also understandable given the precedence of this publication in relation to “The Psychiatrist” as well as the larger prestige enjoyed by the novel in comparison to the short story. However, it seems out of the question that the 1882 volume continues the process of transformation of Machado de Assis’ fiction that takes place from 1880 forward. Aside from issues of biographical order,<sup>3</sup> it is important to reaffirm that, from the beginning of 1880, Machado de Assis manifested a keen interest for psychological complexity and moral ambiguity, given the “eternal human contradiction,” to use an expression-synthesis from “A igreja do diabo.”<sup>4</sup> Since then, his work as a fictionist is dedicated more and more to the analysis of the subtleties of inner life and to the critical staging of social representation.

Certainly motivated by the spirit of the period, the fictionist was not absent from contemporary debates, integrating them in the original construction of a universe that is unmistakably *machadiano*. The articulation of psychiatry with politics, which is the axis of “The Psychiatrist,” well illustrates the process of re-elaboration of circumstantial topics in view of the literary accomplishment of the work. During that period, psychiatric studies promised to unveil enigmas of the mind, while the advancement of scientific knowledge and technology reinforced the belief in the myth of progress. Such themes, constitutive of the nucleus of “The Psychiatrist,” re-appear in several stories in *Papéis avulsos*, where it is possible to identify traces of the same theme, fertile variations. Thus, science’s presumptuousness, satirized in the figure of the psychiatrist through the use of a hyperbolic rhetoric, returns in the story “Education of a Stuffed Shirt” (“Teoria do medalhão”) and the com-

pletely “perfect mental inadequacy”<sup>5</sup> taught by Janjão’s father with the intention of initiating his son in the “difficult art of thinking what has been thought”<sup>6</sup> and qualifying him for the “noble calling”<sup>7</sup> of being a *stuffed shirt*. The novelty of psychiatry also appears in the subtitle of “The Looking Glass: Rough draft of a new theory of the human soul” (“O espelho: uma nova teoria da alma humana”), where the metaphysical precept of the human being’s duality is exposed to ridicule when reduced to the rigid scheme of the two souls: one interior and one exterior. The final short story of that volume, “Last Request” (“Verba testamentária”), returns to the topic of psychic pathology, overstressed in the case of Nicolau, “one of the most morbid curiosities of this century,”<sup>8</sup> whose destructive-maniac furor is directed towards everything that means recognition, distinction, reputation, or fame. One more coincidence remains in the association of psychology with politics, given that the “disease” of the protagonist evolves *pari passo* with the volubility of his options in face of the alternatives that history offers him. We can find another similarity in the presumptuous pose of the “wise doctor” (“médico sabido”), whose diagnosis is as categorical as it is senseless, and whose therapy is as uncommon as innocuous. In other short stories, we can see partial aspects that integrate the matrix of “The Psychiatrist.” It is, for example, the theme of perspective reversal, inversion or simply changing the terms of the equation without actually altering it. Thus, if the mark of madness in “The Psychiatrist” shifts abruptly from the exceptional to the normal, from unbalanced to the perfectly balanced, from alterity to identity, and from other to (my)self, the arrogance of the stuffed shirt gives a positive value to what commonsense considers negative and vice-versa. In an analogous manner, it is through appearance or exterior soul that, according to the “philosophy” of Alferes Jacobina, the essence of the subject is recognized, just as the order inverted by Nicolau devalues what is valuable, and values what is worthless.

Besides, the madness unveiled in “The Psychiatrist” in a series of paradoxes was already present, in its complexity and detours, in the last chapter of *Posthumous Memoirs*, when Brás Cubas and the psychiatrist meet, the latter sent to the narrator’s home by the insane Quincas Borba. The way the theme is introduced surprises due to the unusual association that makes melancholy and mockery, solemnity and irony, humor and critical causticity interact. Such mixed language seems to be the privileged resolution for seizing an idea that, in its slippery mobility, insists on avoiding the psychiatric-scientist’s attempt to capture it, inducing him to adopt oblique tactics of

approach rather than the straightforward observation or frontal charge. In *Posthumous Memoirs*, such strategy is defined in four very short chapters (CLIII, CLIV, CLV, CLVI) when both psychiatrist and patient stand face to face in a quick alternation of roles. The dialogue between both interlocutors, in the beginning direct and sincere, later slips into disdainful insinuations and afterwards tries to uphold itself by using clichés from popular proverbs. But later it can be identified that, in the opposite direction of this ordinary judgment, the identification of mental insanity goes through the conjectural via the uncertain fact. Objectively, the indictment is no more than a signaling gesture that, initially pointed by Quincas Borba in the direction of Brás Cubas, is dislocated by the psychiatrist in the direction of the maddened philosopher to, immediately, be deviated in that of an anonymous servant completely foreign to the conversation between both interlocutors. In fact, inoffensively occupied in airing the carpets at the window of the “richly furnished room” (*Posthumous* 198) of his master, the servant does not even suspect that he is the observation target of the psychiatrist and remains indifferent and impervious to the arrows shot at him. To the aleatory hesitation of the name, the instability of its meaning is justified, oscillating between the serious and the comic. Brás Cuba’s first conclusion is that, if “we all have an Athenian madman in us,” then “a grain of folly, far from doing harm, gives a certain spice to life.” Thus, as in the beginning, Brás Cubas dismisses the psychiatrist’s denunciation in his regard, arguing that he does not feel insane but, almost immediately, he considers that the insane usually have this opinion of themselves. Would not that glimpse of a flight of insanity be anticipating the inconsistency of the “scientific” hypothesis and of the “clinical” experiences of the psychiatrist Bacamarte? Such signaling encourages the search for analogies between both narratives. If, on the one hand, both underline the volatility of the concept and the uncertainty of the diagnosis, on the other, the evil is announced as something imminent, ready to manifest itself in the behavior of anyone. Also, the second paragraph in chapter CLIX, the next to last in the novel, somehow coincides with the ending of the novella when it enunciates that “Quincas Borba was not only mad, but he knew that he was mad, and that remnant of madness [...] greatly complicated the horror of the situation” (202). In both narratives, the tactic of surprise is at work. Suddenly, the comical register of voluble suppositions or fragile hypothesis transform into dramatic *pathos*: the horror of the individual that, in a moment of lucidity, recognizes himself insane. That “suicídio da razão” that Augusto Meyer raises to

the category of “humor transcendental” (51-59) well represents the fatality of the psychiatrist incapable of breaking the circle that, in the end, completes itself, returning to the very beginning. For the rest, this rotation of consciousness around itself summarizes Bacamarte’s intellectual adventure.

Determined from the beginning to isolate the headquarters of insanity, he subscribes to the hypothesis that madness would be a privilege of just a few, a rare anomaly placed in an obscure corner of the brain, like a pearl embedded in a shell. But, after beginning to house madmen in the Casa Verde, he verifies that the number is much higher than what he imagined. What, in the beginning, was supposed to be an island, later reveals itself as a continent, as the metaphoric language of the text states. And when the proportion of interns reaches four fifths of the population of Itaguaí, it becomes evident that it is not a deviation but rather a repetitive incidence according to the established norm. The “external frontier of the abnormal” (Foucault, *Vigiar* 163) is eliminated and there the exception transforms itself into the rule, discrepancy into agreement, and the principle of differentiation into a factor of homogenization. Understanding the contradiction in the act, Bacamarte returns to the initial project, to the formerly excluded island, and, abruptly, inverts the order of factors and the content of the equation to adequate the hypothesis to the status of the anomaly. Coerced by the statistical logic, once again he reconstructs the borderline of difference, enunciating a new paradox: insane would be “the well balanced minds” (“Psychiatrist” 43), those that present themselves in a perfect state of balance. If, on the one hand, the recuperation of the limit suggests a return to the hypothesis of the deviation of the norm, on the other, the alienist gives an extraordinary leap, shifting from psychiatric discipline to moral philosophy. Previously, any symptom of psychic unbalance was a sign of insanity; now, identified with the absence of such symptoms, the problem is displaced to the domain of a moral deviation. Psychiatrist disguised as moralist or, more accurately, as anti-moralist, Bacamarte then substitutes the therapeutic practices for exercises that corrupt behaviors considered virtuous. And, for that, he changes the target of his inquiry and inverts the orientation of his practice. After returning the unbalanced to freedom, he begins to house in the asylum all the perfectly balanced, that is, the ones that were previously considered psychiatrically healthy and morally perfect. But, since virtue and vice are now marked with inverted signals, the psychiatrist should practice a method that will systematically target the perversion of behaviors and the correction/corruption of customs. The

therapy that is adopted for the treatment of the perfectly balanced reveals itself one hundred percent effective, given that no virtue can resist for too long the pedagogy of vice. Thus, modesty gives way to vanity, as humility cannot resist pride, altruism selfishness, integrity falseness, and so forth. Strangely, it is the therapeutic method destined to unbalance the balanced that is declared in the text, whereas the procedure adopted to balance the unbalanced remains implicit. Thus, in the style of a moral parody, Machado draws a caricature of psychiatry and, through the strategy of psychiatry, undoes the system of moral philosophy, twice breaking the enclosure of disciplinary reason through procedures relative to the elaboration of the fictional context. The transgression of disciplinary boundaries pushes interpretation beyond the areas of specific domain and projects the signifiers to groups of different signification, where new meanings that highlight the interdisciplinary transgression emerge.

In dealing with the topic of the balanced, “The Psychiatrist” anticipates the argument of the short story “A igreja do diabo,” published two years later in the collection *Histórias sem data* (1884). However, this expansion of the seminal reason confirms Simão Bacamarte as an emblematic figure among the “pathological” characters of Machado de Assis, even though it is Rubião from *Quincas Borba* (1891) who is the most systematically constructed character according to the psychiatric model. It is that, in gathering traces dispersed in other narratives and making diverse motives and functions interact, the narrator traces for the mad psychiatrist a unique and multilayered profile, although under the mask of caricaturesque distortion. Thus, highlighted attributes of the doctor-scientist stereotype—cold, arrogant, enigmatic, and inflexible—can be found disseminated in other similar characters, like the cynical Brás Cubas, obsessed with the idea of a poultice capable of curing humanity of melancholy; the sadist Fortunato from “A causa secreta”; Fulgêncio from “Ex cathedra,” a “crazy old man” (“velho lunático”) that pretends to be a philosopher of love; the Dutch doctor of “Verba testamentária”; also the Dutch Dr. Jeremias Halma from “O lapso”; Procópio from “O enfermeiro”; the wise men from “As academias de Sião” who presume themselves “the light of the world” (“a claridade do mundo”), and many others, all accomplished individualists, egocentric, and misanthropes, although hypocritically vested as some sort of philanthropy or altruism. Bacamarte is the strangest character of the Machadian gallery of madmen. Eighty years after the story’s first publishing, a well-respected critic of Machado said, “the psy-

chiatrist is a bewilderment” (Meyer 55), thus leaving a statement of his surprise with the complex profile of the character that, still today, challenges the craftiness of the interpreter. In fact, more than one hundred and twenty years of exposure to the negative gaze of critics do not seem to be enough to undo, for once, some knots that complicate the writing of that unique fictional accomplishment. Likewise, we should add that the enigmatic appearance that the character still reveals crosses over all the narrative levels and seems to have been consciously prepared given that it is explicitly manifested, from the first lines of the text, when the narrator introduces several themes woven into the fabric of the text and later undone in the different plot twists. From the beginning, the protagonist introduces himself as a determined individual, having decided to assume his destiny and capable of realizing, alone, his life objective. Immersed in the enlightened knowledge he acquired in Europe and declaring himself endowed exclusively for science, Bacamarte pretends to make the will to knowledge prevail over the will to power. In that first characterization of Bacamarte, there are already the main thematic lines of the novella that, different and opposed at first sight, will intersect, combine, and oppose in the development of the action. Later we will see that the refusal of political positions available in the metropolis in favor of the decision to take the lights of science to an ignored corner of the remote province, far from liberating him from the ties of power, will compromise him, even if indirectly, to authoritarian practices, disguised in the appearance of scientific formality. Publicly cultivating the image of a personality that is immune to the pleasures of power, austere devoted to the study and the search for knowledge like an ascetic, isolated in the seclusion of his work, he considers himself immune to the siege of political power. However, in the manner of the enlightened despot, the “physician of noble birth [...] was one of the greatest doctors in all Brazil, Portugal, and the Spains” (1). As the only psychiatrist-scientist in Itaguaí, he is the sole owner of an irrevocable knowledge, taking upon himself the role of possessor of a domain that extends from medicine to justice, social control to moral reform, from the Casa Verde to Itaguaí. In practice, Simão Bacamarte brings together the functions of the autocrat invested of all powers to formulate, promulgate, and interpret the norms that apply and rule over all members of the community. In reality, it is he who exercises the supreme authority in the town whilst all the other powers of Itaguaí depend on him.

The writing of “The Psychiatrist” superimposes two centuries and two continents in a horizon in which obstinacy and adversity, caricatural defor-

mation and realist annotation, dated references and allegorical transpositions come together. Thus from the historic as well as the thematic point of view, the discourse becomes more complex given that during the enlightenment of the eighteenth century—the period of the utterance—the narrative imposes the scientific discourse of the nineteenth century—the reigning environment during the period of the enunciation. From that double perspective and in spite of precise references to specific situations and events, the narrative articulates a series of values belonging to literary fabulation. The seeming anachronism, in which ideas from the eighteenth-century enlightened metropolis, removed from their place of origin and put to the test in a dark corner of a far-away province, establishes an eerie time and space. There, the enlightened absolutism of the Pombaline reform of the end of eighteenth century and the scientific rationalism of late nineteenth-century Brazil emerge, transfixed in the behavior of the psychiatrist obsessed by the purpose of tracing the borderline that determines the place of madness and that distinguishes, with precision, the limits of reason. Still relating to the ideas of the time, Machado distances himself from controversy, responding in his particular way, that is with irony and humor, to the fashion of polemic and to the solemn rhetorical apparatus so highly valued and practiced at the time. Irreverently striking against the dogma of science that, in the positivist line, could take the place of religion, the fiction writer contrasts with the position of Silvio Romero, for instance. In defense of evolutionist theories against positivism, Romero raised the arms of polemic and, in defense of his doctrine of preference, underlined its condition of unquestionable truth. From the side of rhetoric, Rui Barbosa spoke louder with his energetic eloquence, plethora, and baroque ornamentation of the phrases, inherited from the nineteenth-century prose of Antonio Vieira.

Given the polysemy of the literary discourse, the extra-, inter-, and intra-textual explorations of “The Psychiatrist” seem endless: thus the multiplicity of the levels of reading. Calling attention to the ambivalence, the registers that mark the contextualization are revealed in the text itself, while the identification and interpretation of the signs implied in the fabric of the text require a more laborious unweaving. Hence, the continued emergence of signifiers renews, with each reading, the contemporary quality of the text. And would it not also be because of that that the implications of the disastrous adventures of Simão Bacamarte never seem completely unveiled, and remain, until today, in a challenging attitude and surrounded by a certain enigmatic air, even after one hundred and twenty years of critical inquiries?

Also, the insignificant Itaguaí, a village close to the city of Rio de Janeiro of the period of the Viceroyalty, despite signals of material progress, and, suddenly shaken by new doctrines and ideas that stumbled with the cultural ennui and the overall backwardness of the place, more than the scene of the story, transforms itself into an allegorical horizon of the impasse of rationalist logic. The Green House ("Casa Verde"), a palace constructed in the "finest thoroughfare in Itaguaí," with its fifty windows on each side, "a courtyard in the center and two hundred cubicles, each with one window" (3), speaks of that ambiguity. Constructed according to the technical, scientific, and moral precepts of enlightened reason, and destined to the retirement and treatment of the alienated, it becomes the propitious jurisdiction for political manipulation and domination. A watchful institution, Bacamarte's asylum subjects an entire community to the threat of oppression, thanks to the permanent inquisitorial control of an insane eye housed in it. The oblique reference to the Hospício Pedro II, inaugurated in 1852 with imperial pomp and solemnity, makes the reader revisit the historical origin of that ambiguity. If it is true that, on the one hand, it boasts "the glory, pomp and merit of an Emperor" who sees himself as the representative of the "Enlightenment in the tropics," on the other hand it achieves the partial concretization of a "project of normalizing medicine and hygiene of the city" (Elia 12), the establishment of the first hospital for the mentally ill in Brazil commits the purpose of public health with the interests of the establishment. Dr. Bacamarte's asylum, at the same time, assumes the double position of asylum for the alienated and laboratory of "scientific" research, functioning, at the same time, as juridical tribunal, with full powers to judge, absolve, or condemn. And it is as a supreme institution that it decides, unappealingly, in regards to the public health and the mental and moral sanity of the population. Instituted in the name of order and protection of society, contradictorily, the Casa Verde acts as an element of discord, disseminating fears and uncertainties, creating conflicts and social agitations. As an instance of moral reform, it promotes the homogenization of customs and the end of social and personal differences. In that way, reflections of the Enlightenment, such as the allusive references to the idealized reign of reason, or indications of material progress, such as the urban improvements introduced in Rio de Janeiro during the administration of the Viceroy Luís Vasconcelos e Sousa (1779-1890), count of Resende, "man of state, and probably a philosopher" (413), besides enlightening the spirit of the time, lent themselves, overall, to satire the myth of science, the

submission of intelligence to the grandiose rhetoric, and to the dazzling fascination with the ephemeral emergence of the new. The absolute power installed in the Casa Verde echoes the absolutism of the Pombaline regime installed in Portugal. Even the model followed by the psychiatrist reproduces the proposal of reform of the Faculdade de Medicina in Lisbon in 1730, which claimed the “necessity to ban the scholastic and substitute the speculative for the mathematical and experimental teaching” (Saraiva 553-54).

On the other hand, the “Canjicas revolt” (“Revolt of the Stewed Corners”), a name ironically correlated to *farrapos*, *cabanos*, *balaios*—revolutionary movements of popular inspiration from mid nineteenth century Brazil that, especially during the Regency, perturbed the life of the young nation<sup>9</sup>—makes a caricature of the voluble political will, of the opportunism of positions assumed in the heat of the discussion, of the subservience of public opinion to the powerful in turn, as well as the commitment of power to transient personal interests. Turning the language archaic in the interest of adjusting it to the style of the old chronicle (*crônica*), transposing to the eighteenth century psychiatric practices belonging to the nineteenth century and cutting out small local circumstances according to the model of the “important historical event,” Machado’s narrative re-elaborates historically established facts, characters, and situations, opening up perspectives to the understanding in an allegorical sense. And, without excluding the historical truth, the parody of the local episode, re-figured according to the significance of the 1789 Revolution, re-orientes the topic in the direction of origin, because it is during the revolutionary process in France that there arises, for the first time, a humanitarian interest in the mental patient. This theme will be privileged in nineteenth-century psychiatry and will become the monomaniacal obsession of the psychiatrist Bacamarte. Such ambivalence of the discourse, that reinforces the idea of composition in layers, supplies the signifiers with new signifieds that, far from uncompromising them with well-established historical circumstances and situations, re-invigorates the signification that derives from them.

The history of the reception of the work, even when the interpreters pay attention to partial aspects, forms a revealing ensemble of the complexity and the versatile polyvalence of the text. And, despite the diversity and divergence of the points of view, one could group the main contributions into two approaches. On the one hand, the most positive critique focuses on the recognition, identification, and interpretation of indications related to the external context. Whether rescuing dominant doctrines of the nineteenth

century, such as positivism and evolutionism, or alluding to political facts, such as rebel movements that marked turbulent moments of the Brazilian monarchy, especially during the Regency, the fictional discourse models such perspectives firmly anchored in the historical context whose marks are always possible to identify between the lines of the text. On the other hand, there are those studies engaged in the excavation of the subtext. On the more traditional side, interpreters as different as Barreto Filho and Wilson Martins come close: the first reading the novella as a “very precise satire of our imperfections, especially of our political immaturity that turns us into candidates to tyranny” (Filho 146), while the second considers it an “ironic parable with respect to our conceptions regarding mental health and madness” (Martins 123), without ceasing to see it as political satire where one can see, “the little respect Machado de Assis had for mass movements, and the obvious skepticism with which he faced civic virtues and for the political talents of public speakers” (126). In the same manner, Kátia Muricy also privileges the historical context, reading “The Psychiatrist” as the expression of the “corrosive and good-humored criticism of Machado de Assis to the myths of science in his time,” whose novelties “are those that the psychiatrists of the nineteenth century brought to society, through social medicine.” Even the retrocession of the time contextualized in the narrative is interpreted by the critic as “the necessary scansion for the author to feel more free to criticize the scientific conceptions of his time” (Muricy 330). In addition to that, Muricy also identifies in the doctor and social scientist Simão Bacamarte the “herald of modernity,” and, in the village of Itaguai, “the allegory of Brazilian society of nineteenth century.” Although compromised with the historicist method, John Gledson points out the multivalence of the text when referring to the composition layered at different levels, “with its possible allegories, its semi-mythical time and space,” aspects that are articulated with “a more quotidian and realist setting: a realism of skillfully placed observations” (Gledson 39-40). A more systematically text-oriented reading is that of Luiz Costa Lima who, in working the metaphor of the palimpsest, reaches a more ample and fully comprehensive point of view. This metaphor is a support for the imbricated and superimposed writings and serves to unravel the threads of the plot and of the well-threaded narrative syntax. Costa Lima analyzes each of the three main variables, which call into question, respectively, science, language, and power (Lima 253-67). The common reader can immediately comprehend the first variable that is evident in the text, which, personified in

Bacamarte's trajectory, consubstantiates in the will to know. In a manner not as evident as the first, but also implied in it and in confrontation to it, is the writing centered in the will to power, clearly legible in several episodes, like in the revolt of Canjicas, the rhetorical disputes of the councilmen, and in the passionate discourses of the leaders of the revolt. Many times implicit, there is a moment in the actions of the rebels that demonstrate their desire for power clearly and openly. It is the scene in which Porfirio, in front of "three hundred heads [...] radiant with civism and somber with fury" ("Psychiatrist" 23) invites his friends to the demolition of the Casa Verde. In this decisive instant, "the barber felt a surging ambition to rule. If he succeeded in overthrowing the psychiatrist and destroying the Green House, he might well take over the Town Council, dominate the other municipal authorities, and make himself the master of Itaguaí" (24). In that manner, the leader of the revolt imagines being able to substitute "the experiments of a medical despot" (21) for the populist despotism of the rebel group. In a more oblique manner, the will to power is also manifested through the "truths" of the Casa Verde's autocrat, since it is from the proclamation of each one of those truths that he expands his control over the population of Itaguaí. The third variable, which transverses and makes the other two feasible, is focused in the language. As the basis of discourse, of the rhetorical apparatus and supporting pillar of the narrative structure, language grounds the textual quality and fuels the dynamic of the elaboration of the fable. This, which could be denominated as the energy of the word and transverses all levels in the text, contains all possibilities intrinsic to language itself and the possible representations of the narrative language, constituting themselves as the source of meaning that are renewed in the writing. In the beginning, language presents itself as an imaginary source of the fictional text when the narrator/editor makes reference to a supposed document where he found registered the chronicles (*crônicas*) of the remote times of the village of Itaguaí. Throughout the discourse, the thematized presence of the word is revealed in the figures of speech, the hyperbolic rhetoric of political pronouncements, the commonplace as well as in the pronounced traits of the stereotyped characters. In a more subtle form, the language has an ironic-satiric beat that makes possible the eroding action of the text. As the narration's substance, and the repertoire of alternatives at the narrator's disposal, language is the means that puts into action the constitutive potential of the fable and that materializes the critical efficiency of the discourse, authentic values of the discourse of Machado de Assis, more than an instrumental or decorative resource.

Given the acuteness and the sharp intuition of its original contribution in relation to the criticism on “The Psychiatrist,” we cannot omit the essay by Augusto Meyer, “Na Casa Verde,” where Meyer traces an original horizon for the reading of the short story. In recognizing in the novella a type of humor close to the “nihilistic pyrrhonism” (“pirronismo nülista” [Meyer 54]) the critic identifies, in the satire of Simão Bacamarte, an implacable and, without return, incursion to the domains of the absurd. In that manner, the extreme humor, in which thought and action, like *intellectus ipse*, whirl their own vertigo, it is the mental activity itself that, logically, commits suicide. Following its movements, we can perceive that Bacamarte is going around in narrowing circles until succumbing to the final asphyxia, maintaining all the time the same inflexible posture, despite the mental and operational reversal of position into which he is forced with the announcement of each new thesis. Formally, the most recent proclamation reproduces the way of being of the previous, given that, involved in the same form of categorical judgment, the new “truth” is only the opposite of the old “truth.” Thus, reason cannot break the siege that imprisons it in the circle itself. Even when, in a gesture of seeming self-criticism, the psychiatrist confesses that he made a mistake and affirms as truth the thesis opposed to the previous one, the substitution of the “mistaken” doctrine for the “correct” one does not alter the assertive posture of the authoritarian discourse. Dislocating or inverting the meaning of the propositions, the dogmatic character remains, and with it the will for control and power is denounced. In this Janus-like image of Simão Bacamarte, the narrator combines the rigorous portrait of a man who “was troubled by nothing outside the realm of science” (8) with accentuated traces of the inflexible inquisitor, always cold and implacable, as denounced by the his “steady, calm, enduring” eyes (7), always ready to thrust in the observed woman (or man), those eyes like a pair of “daggers” (13). The coldness of his character associates with the calculated reasoning that precedes important decision-making, such as his marriage with the widow D. Evarista—“neither beautiful nor charming”—and, thus elected, given her “physiological accomplishments” (1), and so being “likely she would give him healthy, robust children” (1). After his scientific previsions were contradicted through the calculated and solid means of science, he plunged “deeper into his work” confining his field to “psychopathology” (2). Isolated in the enclosed space of his small universe, “buttoned up to the neck with circumspection” (9), he assumes, externally, the stereotype of the austere, modest, and honest scientist, “as befits a man of

learning" (2). However, deeply nurtured by the excessive ambition of knowledge, he devotes himself to the study of the chosen object: "the main thing in my work at the Green House is to study insanity in depth, to learn its various gradations, to classify the various cases, and finally to discover the cause of the phenomenon and its remedy" (4). Nevertheless, the knowledge that the psychiatrist pursues is not satisfied with the science of observation and classification since, inspired by the model of positive knowledge, he wants tangible results, seeking to effectively interfere in the domestic habits and public behavior of individuals. In that way, the treatment of mental illnesses is not yielded to the domain of diagnostics and therapeutics anymore, since, besides turning medicine into a judicative practice and the therapeutic in a corrective process, it turns the asylum into a space of "inquiry more efficient than judiciary power" (Muricy 43). In practice, the asylum of Itaguaí accumulates the functions of a tribunal that accuses, judges and condemns without appeal.<sup>10</sup> Even when he changes the meanings of his thesis, the psychiatrist remains the same implacable judge. At the point at which he denies unbalance as a symptom of madness, although motivated in statistical reason because there are a rare few who can demonstrate a full capacity, he continues tied to the circle of the certainties he proclaims, without altering the itinerary and authoritative stance. Thus, when announcing as truth the hypothesis that crazy are those who demonstrate full mental capabilities, he retakes the initial step, the notion of madness as exception. One more time, madness is *that rare pearl incrustated in the shell of reason*. With the detour clearly defined, he goes after the most illustrious cases, flagrant exceptions that have in common some excess or exaggeration marked by a strong trace. For instance, Costa, who distributes the enormous fortune of four hundred thousand *reais*, is a case of extreme generosity; the saddler Mateus, owner of the biggest and most sumptuous house of Itaguaí, exceeds in the ostentation of richness; Martim Brito and Sebastião Freitas, with their rhetorical ravishment, sin for their exaggerated verbosity; Gil Bernardes, capable of going out of his way to shake the hand of a man or to bend, almost touching the ground, to salute a woman, overdoes his courteousness. The cases of Sebastião Freitas, Crispim Soares, Porfírio, and D. Evarista do not differ from the model. The town councilor is taken to the Casa Verde for "extraordinary inconsistency" (32), the druggist for "psychopatic duplicity" (31), and the wife of the psychiatrist for "vestimania" (34), the symptom of the ostensive attachment to dresses and jewels. Here, a space for the gradualism of Brás

Cubas does not seem possible since in those climaxes to which all arrived, what is affirmed is the anomaly of individualized particularities against a generic and undifferentiated base. However, it is necessary to pay attention because, when noticing that the exception generalizes, the psychiatrist abandons it. That tactic was adopted in the first hypothesis when he realized that the abnormal was too proximate to the universal, and it will be repeated in the second, when he proves that the effect of the therapy reaches the universality of the treated cases. In summary, as the psychiatric doctor as well as the moral philosopher, what the psychiatrist obtains as a consequence of his theoretical speculations and “therapeutic” experiences is to “normalize” the exception and cancel it, thus amplifying the reach of its comprehension. In any case, the path that the psychiatrist-scientist follows is that of the solipsist monologue, characterized by the hypertrophy of the subjectivity of the self. And, finally, in the deflexion that prepares the conclusion, when he recognizes himself as the only and most perfect madman of Itaguaí, the psychiatrist reaches the climax of unmeasured ambition and precipitates into the irremediable destruction, reincarnating the myth of the snake that bites its own tail. Thus, the turn that he proclaims as the discovery of his ultimate, underlying truth is no more than the full circle around himself, returning, in the end, to the beginning. In this fatal paradox in which he recognizes himself as the only man in Itaguaí endowed with all the qualities and free of any defect, a morally perfect man and, because of that, the only madman, unreason takes the appearance of reason, while the power of science vanishes. It is not different from the conclusion of the narrator when he says that, “set about the business of curing himself,” the psychiatrist died “as insane as ever” (44). Paradoxically, the therapy that proves to be one hundred percent efficient when applied to the other demented, relatively balanced, fails with him, the only perfectly balanced individual. The final knot is tied in an undoable manner for the same reason that, not finding outside of himself a principle that would oppose him, he identifies in himself the ill that annuls and destroys him. Bacamarte, who throughout the entire time impelled himself to isolate and suppress unreason, ends up submerged in it. Metaphorically, it could be said that he triggers against himself the firearm that he permanently carries with him, semantically identified with his own name, since Bacamarte designates a type of firearm.

Underlining the stereotyped traces of the presumptuous learned person—of which the caricature of the scientist is the result—and undoing each step

of the way of the traveled knowledge that drives him to a dead end of self-confinement and, finally, to suicide—the discourse of the insane psychiatrist gives form to a character of ambivalent meaning: at the same time, a satire of the immeasurable ambition of knowledge and a picture of the failure of the will for power. Proudly resisting the injunctions of the political power, passing unharmed through the overthrow of unstable knowledge and expelled as undue intromission all interference of affection and passions, purified reason succumbs to the traps of moral subjectivism disguised as scientific objectivity. On the one hand, that fatality reminds the constitutional process of psychiatry described by Starobinski, whose zero-sum outcome would be,

represented in its tensions and contradictions, dealing with an object that requests it and for which it would not be prepared, being incessantly forced to transcend the limits that were set or that psychiatry determined itself, perceiving itself circumscribed to the movement of its own search and of its construction, learned in the precariousness of each instance that forces it to project a “structure” that will never be effectively raised. (Rigoli 17)

On the other hand, that description does not lend itself to summarizing correctly the adventure of the psychiatrist to the extent where he is condemned to unsay what he said, simulate advancements while making returns, and to follow transcendence (*plus ultra*) while he secludes himself; it is him who declares the annulment of everything he had affirmed. Because of that, together with the dissolution of the object goes the dissolution of the subject. The psychiatric structure is never erected and the psychiatrist implodes, mined through the logic of self-depuration. However, nothing is more deceiving than the language of the psychiatrist, as can be proved in the last judgment that he gives: “This is a matter of science, of a new doctrine [...] and I am the first instance of its application. I embody both theory and practice.” The formula has the appearance of a logically necessary conclusive synthesis. Meanwhile, when substituting the general for the particular, and when reducing comprehension to the singularity of one example, the final judgment of Bacamarte brings back the norm to the side of exception and the subject that formulates it, to the aberration of a unique and fatal case: “He immediately committed himself to the Green House” (44).

The last discovery of the alienated psychiatrist, when giving himself the final synthesis of the theory and practice, retakes, under the prism of humor, the old

Aristotelian question of the viability and legitimacy of a science of the individual (Foucault, *Vigiar* 169-170). After having eliminated the other as well as excluded difference, transformed exception into rule, madness into lucidity, and moral perfection into mental insanity, the possibility of discerning together with the principle of contradiction that would allow the distinction between truth and error, good and evil, sense and non-sense is abolished. Shifting from paradox to paradox, free from the ties of affection, from the mistakes and illusions of common sense, unmasked the fooling appearance of things, reason discovers that everything is without reason. At the end of extreme rationalism, insanity is no longer the perversion of the senses or an uncontrollable imagination, as classic philosophy stated, nor a disturbance of mental capabilities, whose level of intensity and diverse modalities psychiatric science proposed to define and classify, but rather the hyperbolic name of reason itself. And, contradicting good judgment that believes that those who think are not insane, the conclusion of the psychiatrist of Itaguaí is that he is insane, precisely because he thinks. Paradoxically, the intellectual adventure of the psychiatrist, whose epistemological point of departure was Cartesian clarity, after fooling with the volatility of the concepts, ends up in the impasse of reason confined to the dead end of the undistinguishable solipsist. Instead of dissipating the radical doubt, the *cogito* of Simão Bacamarte ignores the first principle of the method and, given the ambivalence or annulment of the symptoms that denounced the dementia, it destroys the semiological path of psychiatric knowledge. In the beginning, obsessed by the purpose of determining with precision the boundary where reason ends and madness begins, he later experiments with the reversibility of the concepts to finally surrender to the inexorability of the final self-execution. A victim of self-sufficient presumption and ignorant of how fragile, unstable, and fleeting are the limits between extreme lucidity and maddened reason, Bacamarte completely fails in his purpose of arriving at a stable truth. However, the failure is not exclusively his since, confined to an ignored corner of the backwards colony, isolated in an environment, which is adverse to him, he becomes the protagonist of a drama that performs the contradictions, paradoxes, and impasses of modern rationality. A picture of a disquiet face of critical thought and caricature of the discursive logic whirling in the abstract, subject and object of reflection turned against themselves, in truth Bacamarte overflows, critically and paradoxically, from the mold of the circumstanced character and of the immediate environment to, in the more ample horizon, aim to kill the cult to reason, progress, power, and the myth of science.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Machado de Assis' "O Alienista" are taken from *The Psychiatrist and Other Stories* (1963) translated by Helen Caldwell and William L. Grossman. "The Psychiatrist" was translated by Grossman. The translations of *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas* come from *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas*. Trans. Gregory Rabassa. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997.

<sup>2</sup> The text of Gama Rosa appeared for the first time in *Gazeta da tarde*, 2 November 1982.

<sup>3</sup> It seems too simplistic the biographical reduction of Lúcia Miguel Pereira: "Between *Iaiá Garcia* and *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas*, between the mediocre romantic and the big novelist, there only existed that: six months of illness, from October 1878 to March 1879, three of which he spent in the country" (Pereira 189).

<sup>4</sup> Assis, "The Devil's Church" 35. In *The Devil's Church and other Stories*.

<sup>5</sup> Assis, "Education of a Stuffed Shirt" 115. In *The Psychiatrist and Other Stories*.

<sup>6</sup> Assis, "Education" 117.

<sup>7</sup> Assis, "Education" 115.

<sup>8</sup> Assis, "Final Request" 139. In *The Psychiatrist and Other Stories*.

<sup>9</sup> During the Regency (1831-1841) the country was shaken by a series of short, but cruel rebellions, commonly known as *rusgas*. Already in 1831, after the renunciation of Pedro I, the adherents of the re-institution of the first reign fought against the nationalists that were against Portuguese control and adherents of the Empire's decline. Under the leadership of José Bonifácio, tutor of Pedro II, those in favor of the king disseminated their ideas in the journal *Canamurus*, hence the popular byname *canamurus*. This group, organized around the Sociedade Federal (thus their name *federalis*, also known as *jurujubas* or *farroupilbas*). The name *cabanos* of Cabanada (Pará: 1834-1836) comes from the Indians that lived in *cabanos* or *palhoças*. The insurgents of the Balaiada (Maranhão: 1838-1841) received the nickname of Francisco dos Anjos Ferreira Balaio, the leader and also craftsman who made and sold *balaios*. The so-called Guerra dos Farrapos (Rio Grande do Sul, 1835-1845) gives the name to the battle between conservatives (*imperiais* or *canamurus*) and liberals (*farrapos* or *farroupilbas*). These defended the federal decentralization and even installed a republican regime with its seat in Piratini, a small city in the interior, hence the pejorative name República do Piratino (Duque 97-179).

<sup>10</sup> "The asylum of the age of positivism, which it is Pinel's glory to have founded, is not a free realm of observation, diagnosis, and therapeutics; it is a juridical space where one is accused, judged, and condemned, and from which one is never released except by the version of this trail in psychological depth—that is, by remorse" (Foucault, *Madness* 269).

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**Ivo Bíasio Barbieri** is Full Professor of Brazilian Literature at the State University of Rio de Janeiro. His books *Oficina da palavra* (1981) and *Geometria da composição* (1997) are studies of Brazilian contemporary poetry. He is currently researching the presence of nineteenth-century psychiatry and psychology in the works of Machado de Assis. His most recent essays address this topic. E-mail: fatimamattos@gmail.com