

Machado de Assis

José Saramago

Translated by Robert Patrick Newcomb

I entered the world of Machado de Assis through the door of the *Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas*. My edition, the fourth, published in 1914 by the Livraria Garnier, includes a prologue in which the author alludes to all those writers who influenced him in creating Brás Cubas, a list that inevitably includes Sterne and Xavier de Maistre. All writers, whether self-taught like Machado, or kissed on the face by the muses and by a furiously intellectual mother, like Elias Canetti, are the children of their readings, and of themselves. These are their true parents. Now if I recall correctly, Diderot is not mentioned when it comes time to list Machado de Assis' influences—and consequently his readings. There are those who would tell me that if Brás doesn't speak of Diderot this is simply because he would not have read him. Possibly. But no one can remove from my head the idea that then it was Diderot who read Brás Cubas ...