



Machado de Assis and psychiatry: a chapter in the relations between art and clinical practice in Brazil*

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Abstract

Madness, its place in society, and the tenuous boundaries separating it from reason became a constant concern in Machado de Assis' literary production as of 1880, when a shift can be observed in his work. Clinical studies exploring the relationships between art and madness have mentioned this writer countless times. The article offers an overview of Brazilian psychiatry's perception of the arts, artists, and the creative process in the early decades of the twentieth century. It presents three studies on Machado de Assis and his works, written during that period by psychiatrists who interpreted artistic phenomenon from the perspective of psychopathology, and endeavors to identify the inner logic of these approaches.

Keywords: madness; literature; occupational therapy; mental health; Brazil.

But literature takes the opposite path and exists only when it discovers beneath apparent persons the power of an impersonal – which is not a generality but a singularity at the highest point... literature begins only when a third person is born in us that strips us of the power to say 'I'.

Gilles Deleuze

Beginning in 1880, in what became known as his second or mature phase, Machado de Assis created characters who lost their congruity and deviated from standard normality. The watershed between the two phases of Machado de Assis's work was *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas* (*The posthumous memoirs of Bras Cubas*; also published as *Epitaph of a small winner*), whose first person narrative is taken up by a deceased author who offers to the reader at the very beginning of the book the *idée fixe* that he considers to be the cause of his death. He describes insanity, observing that if “no one has yet told of his own insanity, I will do it and Science will thank me” (Assis, 1994a, p.14).¹

From *Memórias póstumas...* onward, there arises in the author's work, Pereira (2008, p.23) records, a narrator “immersed in the text”. According to this author, the change of form in the narrative is related to the movement, also verifiable in the socio-cultural field, that concerns the coming of modern times. In this context, Machado began to explore more intensely the singularities, small differences, almost infinitesimal expressions of life in the construction of his characters. As he often said, he liked “uncovering the minimal and the hidden. Where no one sticks his nose, there's where mine goes, with the close and keen curiosity that discovers the hidden” (quoted in Teixeira, 1987, p.59). This characteristic would reveal his capacity to focus on details, which would lead him to take pride even in his myopia (Gledson, 1998).

In *Quincas Borba* (also published as *The philosopher or dog?*), Machado de Assis (1994b) placed madness at center stage in the personages of the book's title character and his disciple, Rubião. In these two characters, we find two types of madness: the first, linked to a form of eccentric existence, whose exploration of the paths of thought seem to be the consequence of the movements of a creative spirit; the other, madness of a tragicomic tonality, sadder, revealing the loneliness and abandonment to which the mad person is often condemned.

Meanwhile, it was in the story “O alienista” (“The alienist”, also published as “The psychiatrist”) that the writer explored this topic more profoundly, choosing it as the question around which the writing develops and treating it lucidly and with a sharp critical sense. The thematic center of this work is precisely the discussion surrounding the norm, its existence, the search for it, the boundary between madness and reason, comprising the objective of Simão Bacamarte, the character referred to in the story's title (Assis, 1977).

Telling the story of an asylum and its creation in a small city in Brazil, the writer offers a precise, bruising and extremely ironic analysis of what Brazilian psychiatric practice was at its beginning. Satirizing unconditional acceptance of science and savagely criticizing the psychiatry developed in the nineteenth century, Machado de Assis approaches countless questions throughout the story: the process of disciplining and transforming singularities into pathologies; madness, which sometimes appears where it is expected – among the

crazy in asylums – and at times where we don't look for it – in the doctor, political power and conjugal relations.

In Machado, madness, its place in the society of that age and the tenuous boundaries separating it from reason became a constant concern from the moment when a shift in his work was observed. According to Gledson (1998), in this period Machado experienced a health crisis that caused him to leave Rio de Janeiro for a long time. Was there a relationship between this health crisis and the literary crisis that the writer experienced that led to his interest in psychism, subjectivity and their vicissitudes to come to the forefront? How might we understand this relationship?

Some Brazilian psychiatrists at the start of the twentieth century were interested in the relationships between mental illness and artistic creation and tried to answer that question. They thus began to study the works of Machado through the lenses of psychopathology, relating it to episodes in his life and supposed character traits in a movement that makes up part of the history of the relations between the arts and psychiatry. While writers had taken madness and psychiatry as a theme, psychiatrists, in turn, took writers, artists and their corresponding works as the object of their investigation and directed their study to the relationships between artistic creation and pathology.

In this article, I present three studies produced in the 1920s and 1930s by doctors and psychiatrists devoted to the writer Machado de Assis and his work.² We begin with a delineation of the context in which these studies were produced, briefly indicating Brazilian psychiatry's view of the arts, artists and the creative process during the period. Through an appreciation of the studies devoted to Machado de Assis, I intend to understand the thinking that interpreted artistic phenomena from the viewpoint of psychopathology, working with, as the subject, a renowned writer who, in turn, had used psychiatry and madness as a theme in his work.

Brazilian psychiatry's view of the arts and creation in the 1920s and 1930s

In 1932, together with Di Cavalcanti and Antônio Gomide, Flávio de Carvalho founded the Clube dos Artistas Modernos (Modern Artists Club, known by the acronym CAM), a center for publication of research undertaken by the artists and a meeting place enlivened by studios. The following year the Madmen and Children's Month was organized there, an event of intense programming that included a series of conferences and debates and the participation of artists, doctors and intellectuals.³

Pacheco e Silva, then director of the Juqueri Hospital, presented the conference "A arte e a psiquiatria através dos tempos" (Art and psychiatry through the ages). From the start he confessed his ignorance with respect to everything concerning modern art: "when I come across artistic expressions that deviate from the classical guidelines that I've become used to seeing and hearing since my childhood, my first impression is the same I had when observed a teratologic case in medicine". Despite this, he said he had accepted the invitation to participate in the event with the intention of doing his duty: "whether to support, criticize or fight, no one is allowed to refuse the call when summoned to opine on matters of social interest" (Pacheco e Silva, 1936, p.132).

He then spoke about various points in which, he believed, art and psychiatry would converge: the instinctive nature of art that could, in his opinion, explain the fact that certain mentally ill people have an artistic vocation; the contribution that the artistic expressions of the alienated could make to clinical studies; and psychiatry as a fertile field for artists in the study of the physiognomic expressions of the emotions, which could be done using “models chosen in the asylum”. Finally, the psychiatrist presented various authors that dealt with the relationship between genius and madness and concluded by stating that “there are ‘true geniuses’ who are not morbid but there are also ‘geniuses’, that we could call pathological individuals, who are merely ‘pseudo geniuses’” (Pacheco e Silva, 1936, p.137).

Some of those invited by CAM introduced psychoanalysis into these discussions⁴, among them Durval Marcondes, who presented the lecture “Psicanálise dos desenhos dos psicopatas” (Psychoanalysis of the drawings of psychopaths). In 1928 this author had developed a study concerning utilization of the psychoanalytical instrument in approaching aesthetic phenomena. Marcondes was the main divulgator of psychoanalytical ideas in Brazil, at the time. His first contact with psychoanalysis was through Franco da Rocha, in 1919, in the inaugural class of the Psychiatry course given at the São Paulo’s School of Medicine (Faculdade de Medicina de São Paulo). Founder of the Juqueri Hospital, Franco da Rocha was the first professor of the Neuropsychiatric Clinic of the São Paulo’s School of Medicine, and this inaugural class – which risked an incursion into the Freudian field by dealing with the sexual origin of delirious phenomena – was published in 1920 as “A doutrina pansexualista de Freud” (The pansexual doctrine of Freud).

Following his initial encounter with psychoanalysis, Durval Marcondes never left this field of knowledge; self-educated in the subject, he taught courses and founded the Brazilian Psychoanalytic Society (Sociedade Brasileira de Psicanálise; Sagawa, 1994). In addition to his insertion in the medical milieu and his fight, albeit without much success, to introduce psychoanalysis into it, he was also a poet and maintained close relations with a group of modernist writers and artists, even having published a poem in the magazine *Klaxon* in 1922 (Bruno, 1994).

In 1926, he wrote *O simbolismo estético na literatura: ensaio de uma orientação para a crítica literária, baseada nos conhecimentos fornecidos pela psicanálise* (Aesthetic symbolism in literature: an essay to guide literary criticism based on the knowledge furnished by psychoanalysis), a thesis presented in competition for appointment to the Literature chair at the Ginásio do Estado de São Paulo and published with a preface by Franco da Rocha. In this text, the author discusses psychoanalysis, explaining that, having been created as a therapeutic method, it subsequently invaded other domains of intellectual investigation. Durval Marcondes dwells on the contribution of this theory to literary aesthetics. According to him, its contribution would be based on a conception of symbolic thinking by means of which dream literature and, consequently, the language of aesthetic forms could be understood: “The analytical study of aesthetic symbolism has the same psychological value as dream interpretation. It enables descending into the depths of the artist’s soul and revealing the intimate mechanism of the creation of a work of art” (Marcondes, 1926, p.12).

Like the dream, artistic creation involved an intense imaginative activity, equivalent to that innate in children and man of remote times. However, in the civilized adult who dreams, the child and primitive man, the imaginative function would remain within normal physiological limits, unless transcended when the individual became so immersed in his imaginary world that he lost the capacity to differentiate dream from reality, entering into pathological terrain. As a result, the author saw the imaginative state characteristic of artistic creation was an unstable balance between health and mental illness. What would differentiate the genius from the madman would be the capacity of the first to return to reality and exteriorize in his works the experience of his immersion into that imaginary world.

Thus, according to Marcondes (1926, p.12), artistic creation was a symbol of an unconscious subjective reality. In this context, art and literary criticism would have “to carefully analyze the aesthetic image and look for the unconscious complex to which it is connected, uncovering the latent ideas to which it is related in the artist’s ‘psyche’. To justify this critical procedure, the author took as his model the study undertaken by Freud of Leonardo da Vinci, who, according to him, demonstrated how far a well conducted critical work could go, “an initiative that deserves to be recognized and imitated” (p.14).

To conclude, Marcondes stated that the artist and the critic are both psychologists, but, unlike the first, the second is a conscious psychologist and, as such, should look at scientific psychology as a technique that will be of great use to him. In his opinion, the interpretation of symbolism in aesthetic forms, when following the “laws of psychology”, would guide the work of criticism toward the path of true science.

These discussions permeated the arts field in the beginning of the twentieth century, when there was great interest in developing studies focused on the psychological approach of artists and works, many of them focusing on the relationship between artistic creation and pathology. In this context, the distinction between creative genius and madman was a recurring theme, and the convergence of these two figures were also frequent, which originated a series of studies on the psychopathological aspect, with renowned artists and writers as the subject. Some of these studies were devoted to the writer Machado de Assis, psychoanalysis being present to a greater or lesser degree. I draw on three of them here to see the thinking in operation that interpreted artistic phenomena from the point of view of psychopathology.

Characters and writer studied as clinical cases

In a 1921 text, doctor Luiz Ribeiro do Valle demonstrated his interest in the clinical observation that, according to him, many Brazilian writers were capable of. Starting with the premise that, “in an age in which clinical observations are extremely rare, with no method, based on strict empiricism, the literature presents types who were scientifically observed by the authors’ ingenious intuition” (Ribeiro do Valle, 1921, p.6), Ribeiro wrote *Certos escritores brasileiros psicopatologistas* (Certain psychopathological Brazilian authors), in which he used a psychiatric perspective to look at the characters of a number of writers, among them Coelho Netto, Renato Vianna and Monteiro Lobato. In those of Coelho

Netto, for example, he finds “a brilliant gallery of abnormals”, which incarnated certain diagnostic situations such as psychosis, sadism, obsessive-compulsive disorder, phobia, obsession, amnesia, psychic epilepsy, paranoia, the pathological mental state of tuberculosis patients, in sum a gamut of pathological types – faithfully described, in his opinion. Monteiro Lobato had the merit of observing and telling in a felicitous and intelligent manner, not only the morbid state of the character Jeca Tatu, characterized by “pathological laziness” – “a natural consequence of his profound asthenia and almost incurable cachexia”, but also the various verminoses and tropical diseases that this type had (p.45).

In *Psicologia mórbida na obra de Machado de Assis* (Morbid psychology in the work of Machado de Assis; Ribeiro do Valle, 1918), the psychiatrist applied his analytical methodology to the characters as clinical cases, expanding it toward an interpretation of the morbid nature of the writer himself. Based on the idea that, through his genius, Machado de Assis knew how to describe a “legion of morbid thinking types, making a priceless contribution to morbid psychology”, Ribeiro stated that the study of Machado’s work from a psychiatric viewpoint became obligatory (p.6). In his opinion, Machado de Assis was able to analyze the human soul and “only an ingenious intuition could create someone like Rubião, because not only is the primary school teacher enriched by an inheritance, but by general paralysis as well, described in scholarly fashion, a chapter of art and science, that the most renowned of all psychiatrists could not do” (p.169).

Gradually the psychiatrist shifted his analysis to “refer to the mental personality of Machado de Assis”, explaining that the life of a great writer is the best commentary and explanation of his work. He then introduces us to the writer’s half-breed origin, the consciousness of “racial inferiority” that he carried within, his stuttering and his “pathological mental state of an epileptic” (Ribeiro do Valle, 1918, p.167, 168).

After stating that he is in no way diminishing the importance and genius of the writer, Ribeiro do Valle (1918, p.170) says he is interested in exploring the relationships between genius and neuropathy. To do so, Machado de Assis would be the best example in Brazil. Next, he presents several authors who analyzed the question and their respective viewpoints, using references very close to those offered by Pacheco e Silva at the CAM, having arrived at conclusions that were also very similar: “This question is very complex and all these authors vacillate in a still largely unknown territory; even science, in its current state, is not capable of providing a satisfactory solution” (p.179).

Although aware of the weakness of psychiatric thought in explaining questions of the arts and creation, Ribeiro do Valle, in his analysis, clearly shows the prejudiced attitude that marked the psychiatric approach to human suffering. We see in his argument psychopathological reasoning being constructed based on a series of discriminatory notions, in particular concerning characteristics of race and origin, an expression of the intensity with which eugenic thinking pervaded the psychiatry of that age. Thus, Machado de Assis’s racial miscegenation was pointed out as the cause of his supposed disease or was considered as the disease itself. And, in fact, this perspective is present in most of the psychiatric studies devoted to him at the time.

This discriminatory and eugenic glance at Machado de Assis’s genealogy and the construction of relationships between the characteristics of his style and his supposed

disturbances was not the sole prerogative of psychiatry, appearing in art criticism as well. In the polemic that critic Sílvio Romero directed against Machado in the final decades of the nineteenth century, the writer was treated, according to a nationalistic criterion ethnographically based, as a representative of a “mixed Brazilian sub-race”, who would reveal, together with his characters, the half-breed psychology of the Brazilian people. The critic stated that the writer, being a half-breed, would have little skill in handling vocabulary and phrases, which would be “the exact photograph of his spirit, his indecisive psychological nature”. He even alluded to his speech impediment, by suggesting that his stuttering was reflected in his writing: “one sees that he gropes, stumbles, that he suffers from some sort of problem in his speech organs” (quoted by Ventura, 1991, p.56).

It is important to highlight here, that this violently prejudiced approach – which was present in art criticism during the final decades of the nineteenth century –, no longer found acceptance in the arts field in the twentieth. Nevertheless, it was resurrected by psychiatry in texts written thirty or even fifty years afterwards, as we shall see below.

The study of the writer’s psychology through analysis of his work

In 1930, Américo Valerio examined in depth the psychological study of Machado de Assis and stated that the writer would be “the grandfather of Freudism in our country”⁵, an idea that runs throughout the book *Machado de Assis e a psicanálise* (Machado de Assis and psychoanalysis). The writer’s ability and sensitivity to recognize and describe unconscious functioning and the pathological states arising from it would be founded on his “latent epileptic psychosis” and on his “abnormal personality”, based on his “morbid hereditary past” – characterized by an alcoholic and syphilitic heritage and because he was of African American descent. According to Valerio (1930, p.70), Machado de Assis “dissected human instincts by the egoism of finding in others the same faults, errors and defects of his sickly organization”. “In abnormal individuals – as in the case of Machado de Assis – there are scientific-artistic-literary tendencies, but especially constant obsessions, habitual hallucinations, the frequent courtship of delirious ideas, disassociations of the conscious and personality” (p.223).

The obsessions and hallucinations present in the writer were then reproduced in his characters, revealing not only the “Freudian instincts” that everyone has, but also the writer’s “Freudian psychological understanding”. We thus arrive once more at the convergence of the genius and the madman: “Machado de Assis was an unbalanced individual on the edge of genius”, with “all of his work being merely the expression of Machado de Assis himself” (Valerio, 1930, p.159, 224).

In that study despite use he made of psychoanalysis being superficial and confused, at times, almost comical for the present day reader⁶, which was probably due to the limited knowledge of this school of thought in Brazil, we perceive Américo Valerio’s fascination with Freudian ideas, perhaps in equal measure with the admiration that he devoted to Machado de Assis. For him, Machado was a clinical case, but also a Freudian psychologist and an artist: “a psychopath who metempsychosed a life of Freudian tortures into an immortal life” (p.217).

Américo Valerio's description brings us face to face with a character situated at the point of convergence of three lines: sufferings caused by a wide variety of pathologies; refined and profound knowledge of these pathologies (and therefore, clinical knowledge); and the practice of art as a means of treatment, the latter transformed into a cultural product. We find ourselves faced with the hybrid nature of a "madman/creator/psychologist", a psychologist who untangles the human soul artistically because of his "need to let it out". "His cerebral impulses and conscious obsessions, which originate psychological ideas" (Valerio, 1930, p.223), acquire, on the other hand, aesthetic value. He would, then, also be one who suffered from everything he said and would write about out of necessity and as a form of cure. A clinician who would apply therapy to himself, which would be nothing short of artistic creation itself.

If, however, this confluence of ideas seems to be an interesting finding in Américo Valerio's study, the way in which the study was developed denotes an extremely violent use of the psychoanalytical instrument. And if, according to the author, the intention was not to disqualify the "magnificent work" of the "genius writer", the effect could only be that. Machado de Assis becomes, in this reading, reduced to a being tormented by obsessions and pathologies – even though supposed – marked by an impure heredity. All of his work would merely express a mass of symptoms, his attempt to free himself of the torments that the disease forced upon him and the niggardly desire to point out in his characters "faults, errors and defects" that were his, calling attention to their existence in other people.

Documentation and confirmation of the diagnosis based on his work

We finally comment on the book by Peregrino Jr., *Doença e constituição de Machado de Assis* (The disease and constitution of Machado de Assis), published in 1938, in which the psychopathological thinking is more structured. After presenting the writer as the great name and "a solitary island lost in the unsurprising lake of Brazilian literature", the author proposes to document the constitutional diagnosis that he had attributed on a prior occasion to Machado de Assis, classifying him in "Mme. Minkowska's gallery of glischroids" and "looking to prove, with episodes of his life and elements of his work, his epileptic temperament" (Peregrino Jr., 1938, p.11). With this in mind, he initially presented the writer's biography, in which, as little was known about his past, he once again highlights the "shame of origin", the "inferiority complex", the "morbid temperament", the "pathological constitution", the "epileptic and schizoid nature" and the "glischroid substratum of his slimy concentrated affectivity" (p.21, 22, 24, 34, 37, 61).

In the portrait that Peregrino Jr. (1938) painted of Machado de Assis, we see in operation one of the most frightening aspects of the power to transform behaviors and forms of existence into pathologies. The capacity to make lasting friendships, to be affective and generous with friends is interpreted as "clinging affectivity", characteristic of epileptics and a sign of the "subconscious need for support and protection", while his small number of friends indicate the "schizoid" component of his nature, which counterbalances "the tendencies and excesses of glischroidia" (p.57-73).

The author then related the writer's supposed morbid symptoms and characteristics to his style and his literary procedures. Of the ambivalence of thinking and feeling – for Peregrino Jr. (1938), a trait of *glischroidia* – the work of Machado de Assis was replete with typical examples, mainly in what he called the “stutterer's style”, which he would characterize as: “an ambivalent style, first affirmative, then negative, going forward, then retreating” (p.87). Also his “explanatory tendency ... a minute and useless concern with making everything clear and defined” (p.102), which the doctor saw as one of the most curious traits of the Machadian output, was a sign of the epileptic. Zoopsy is also found in his work, as evidenced in frequent scenes where animals participate and converse. This tendency, according to Peregrino Jr., was common to alcoholics and their descendents, which would sanction the supposition that the writer's parents were alcoholics (p.119).

Machado's obsession with the problem of madness and abnormality was allegedly proof of his closeness to them. His preference for certain themes and sensual references to the arms, eyes and hair of women would be an expression of “certain Freudian complexes and a certain fetishistic tendency” present in his ‘lascivious mind, whose subconscious was inhabited by the repressions and complexes that the researcher comes upon at every step” (Peregrino Jr., 1938, p.103, 111). Machado's work also contained ternary rhythmic constancy – of which the author gives us countless examples⁷ – that symbolized the three phases of the epileptic crisis, as well as being an expression of arithomania, common among obsessive-compulsives (p.146).

For Peregrino Jr. (1938, p.155), the final works of Machado de Assis would express the “aggravation of his malady through ideas and somber visions that peopled his sick mind and emerge in his work in the disguise of implacable, pitiless, uncharitable reasoning that dissects everything and inexorably strips bare his characters, all moral madmen, abnormal people”.

Thus, according to the psychiatrist, we can follow in the writer's output the progressive development of the ‘malady’: sadism, masochism, narcissism, autism, self reference; and, mainly, “an essential trait of epilepsy are accentuated ... the love of accessories, the minutiae, the small details of insignificant appearance. ... The relentless malady worked on Machado's old and sick inner ruins to undermine the writer's spirit and nature, exacerbating his fundamental *glischroid* traits” (Peregrino Jr., 1938, p.157).

Peregrino Jr. found in Machado de Assis's works, in the ways in which he wrote, in the procedures that were uniquely his, confirmation of the diagnosis and the morbid constitution that he had attributed to the writer. He does exactly what the objective of the psychopathologists of expression has been since Simon, who, in 1876, used his patients production, wishing to approach their different mental diseases and looking for specific varieties of the visual, written and audio forms for each disease (Lafora, no date). Justifying the procedure with the work of Kretschmer, devoted to the study of men of genius, artists and writers, the author states that the “German master” approaches modern art movements from the viewpoint of temperaments, especially emphasizing expressionism.

Final notes

If there was, as Roudinesco suggests (Apr. 8, 2001), a dispute between literature and psychiatry regarding the effort to formulate an explanation for the phenomenon of madness, in the light of our times the writers seem to have been more successful than psychiatric science in understanding this phenomenon. And while today the psychiatric studies of Machado de Assis – which viewed the artist and his work as someone mentally ill and the expression of his disease, respectively, and looked for indications of a certain pathology in his procedures and language – are outmoded, his work has become increasingly stronger and more potent with the passing of time.

Given his interest in exploring the human soul, his elegance and delicacy in dealing with the most complex questions, Machado de Assis was capable of simultaneously revealing certain experiences of madness and bringing to light the mechanisms of power involved in the relations between the State and psychiatric science. Perhaps because of this, Américo Valerio (1930, p.216) had affirmed that the writer had “foreseen Freudism”, and Nise da Silveira (Encontro..., 1992), declared that “before reading a heavy psychiatry manual, better to read Machado de Assis for the tenth time”.

In the early years of this century, Lúcia Serrano Pereira applied the approach of a dialogue between literature and psychoanalysis to develop a thorough study of Machado's text. The author establishes a relationship between the novel *Dom Casmurro* and Freud's text “The stranger” and considers that the two authors bring to their works enlightenment that impacts the subjectivity of our times. Developing her study for research on the Machadian story, the author in her book *O conto machadiano: uma experiência de vertigem* (The Machadian story: an experience of vertigo) (Pereira, 2004), points out that Machado de Assis makes a connection between form and content and between the subject and the social that often approaches the concept of the functioning of the subject proposed by psychoanalysis (Pereira, 2008). Luiz Dantas (1985, p.152), in turn, sets forth the hypothesis that “O alienista” had foretold the Foucaultian vision of madness. As a result, the tables are turned: instead of psychiatrists explaining the relationships between the writer, his life and his work, it is literature that offers us glimpses of the mysteries of madness and creation and also reveals to us the logic underlying discourses based on the psychopathology of expression.

Machado de Assis's criticism of psychiatry is set forth in “O alienista” by the way Simão Bacamarte constructs a system of classes around the small differences that each inhabitant of Itaguaí eventually presents. The alienist divides the “types of madness” into two large groups – the angry and the meek – and into several sub-classes – the monomanias, the deranged, the various hallucinations. Based on their habits, sympathies, words and gestures, more stimulating topics and new classifications can be created. Thus, we find among the inhabitants of the small city madmen with delusions of grandeur, cases of religious monomania, those who suffer from the “love of stones”, the very generous, the very avaricious, the very vain and those with no vanity whatsoever. Not only are these small day-to-day pains, affections and disaffections, interests and singular life styles revealed to us through the writer's pen, but, through the lenses of the alienist, they are also

transformed into new diagnoses, new forms of conduct to investigate, classify and, finally, cure. Nothing could be closer to the way Machado de Assis's literature was treated by the psychiatrists we have visited here.

One must, however, be aware of the fact that the effort to render the minority's means of subjectivation pathological – which we saw in play in the studies devoted to Machado de Assis and which the author showed in a story written some decades before, in a disturbing inversion of historical times – is not a thing of the past. The theoretical grid used by the authors presented here is currently obsolete, but its logic continues, gaining new strength in contemporary times. We are still today and perhaps more than ever, faced by this logic when we seek in behaviors and productions, in the ways of speaking, moving and acting, evidence and signs of pathologies to be medicated and cured. To enable these differences to be linked with the 'health' (or would it be better to say 'disease?') market through pharmacology or an infinity of therapeutic services, they are organized into syndromes, and every day a new one is presented to us with its symptoms and its cures. Each of us could recognize, in the context of symptoms of so many syndromes, acts, rites and behaviors that we exhibit at some time or another.

Classifications are created based on signs of differences, which allows grouping in the same category all those who have that trait – only one trait among the many that make up an existence – homogenizing it and sapping it of strength. Barriers are created, enclosures that devalue the subject and everything he produces or may produce, weakening his life.

What most impresses in the texts that used Machado de Assis as a clinical case is the three authors' mutual affirmation of admiration of the writer and their similar assertion that they are not questioning his value. What such a treatment does, however, is undermine the worth of the creator and the power of his work, reducing it to a mass of symptoms from which he could not escape. Based on that point of view, the writer would have no choice, no will, and the procedures, instead of being forms found in aesthetic work, would be mere symptoms through which each of his pathologies would be present in his work.

This type of thinking supports the disqualification of the creations of those who produces outside the institutionalized circuit of art and it helps forge a valuable distinction between the procedures 'consciously' chosen by the artist and those determined by his unconscious functioning. We also find that idea in the arts field when one speaks up in its defense, closing the door to other productions made in areas or by subjects that are foreign to it. This perspective presupposes that the unconscious is the pathology and that there are artistic creations that are not influenced by the forces of the unconscious. On the other hand, we would find creations that would be a pure expression of the disease, without there being any composition and organization of the unconscious forces, but mere copies of them, which would take form – absolutely identical to that present in the unconscious – in the materiality of paper, clay, paint, without any work.

The three medical and psychiatric studies devoted to Machado de Assis through a contemporary prism enable us to see the lenses the psychiatry of the period utilized to look at the phenomena, patients and works of art. They also make visible the logic that, in a new guise, we still face today. Presenting studies founded on the psychopathological reading of a writer and his work, both of unquestioned quality, is a strategy we use to

expose the violence inherent to this kind of analysis, which, when applied to the works of those caught in the network of psychiatric institutions, often runs the risk of going unperceived. The procedure, however, is also a way to point out new configurations in the relations between creation and clinical practice. If “history, according to Foucault, does not tell us who we are, but what we are in the process of differing ourselves from (Deleuze, 1991, p.119), the studies presented here allow us to access not only a certain historical formation – certain discursive practices that comprise a field of knowledge and establish internal relations of power –, but also its edges, from which a mutation is possible. Perhaps today the binomial expression/pathology may be losing strength, opening the way to research on the mutual implications between creation and health.

As Deleuze observes (1997, p.13), “one does not write with neuroses themselves. Neurosis and psychosis are not passages of life, but states into which one falls when the process is interrupted, blocked, obstructed”. When someone, anyone, writes a text, paints a picture, sculpts a stone, a cultural production is in the making. And a process is also being put in motion, a departure from paralysis, a search for health. In this regard, the French philosopher proposes we think of literature as a health venture and the writer, as a doctor of himself and the world. Nothing could be closer to Machado de Assis’s idea, for whom “art is the medicine and the best of them” (quoted in Lopes, 2001, p.43).

NOTES

* This text presents some of the results of the research *Das Obras aos Procedimentos: Ressonâncias Entre os Campos da Arte e da Terapia Ocupacional* (From Art Works to Procedures: Resonances Between the Fields of Art and Occupational Therapy), conducted in the Clinical Psychology Post-Graduate Studies Program at the Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo (PUC-SP) in 2003, as part of the Phd activities. A general presentation of the research can be found in a previous number of this magazine (Lima, Pelbart, 2007).

¹ All quotations in this article have been freely translated from the original Portuguese.

² Machado de Assis was at that time referred to countless times when considerations were made regarding the relationship between art and madness. In the preface to the book by Osório César, *Artistic expression by the insane*, Motta Filho (1929, p.XVIII) evokes Machado to state that “he suffered from epileptic attacks and lived to awaken the man and madman within himself”, and adds that in “O alienista”, with “painful and bitter irony, he tries to eliminate the dividing line between normality and madness” (p.XIX).

³ According to Leite (1994), the lectures foreseen for that event: “Estudo comparativo entre a arte de vanguarda e a arte dos alienados” (A comparative study of vanguard art and the art of the alienated), by Osório César; “Interpretação dos desenhos de crianças e seu valor pedagógico” (Interpretation of children’s drawings and their pedagogical value), by doctor Pedro de Alcântara; “Psicanálise dos desenhos dos psicopatas” (Psychoanalysis of the drawings of psychopaths), by doctor Durval Marcondes; “A arte e a psiquiatria através dos tempos” (Art and psychiatry through the ages), by doctor Pacheco e Silva; “Marcel Proust literária e psicanaliticamente” (Marcel Proust literarily and psychoanalytically), by doctor Neves Manta; “O louco do ponto de vista da psicologia geral” (The madman from the viewpoint of general psychology), by doctor Fausto Guerner; and “A música dos alienados” (The music of the alienated), by José Kliass.

⁴ Note that psychoanalysis was introduced in Brazil by professors of psychiatry in the context of discussions on art, but it was then severely criticized by the more traditional psychiatrists. The psychoanalysts at the time identified more with artists, intellectuals, journalists and writers (Bruno, 1994, p.45). In the publications of the Liga de Higiene Mental do Rio de Janeiro (The Mental Hygiene League of Rio de Janeiro) during the 1920s, the references to psychoanalysis were occasional and revealed a very superficial and distorted knowledge of the psychoanalytical ideas. Besides, this idea was approached from the prophylactic and eugenic perspective of the League. (Archivos Brasileiros..., 1925-1930).

⁵ The supposition reappears in more recent studies of the writer. See, for example, Freitas (2001): “Not contenting himself with the simple phenomenological fact, he goes in search of unconscious motivations... he is a psychoanalyst. Machado had psychoanalytical thinking before psychoanalysis itself ” (p.70); and “the Machadian texts can be considered as precursors of Freud’s works” (p.77). Or Teixeira (1987), who titles one of the chapters of his work on Machado de Assis “Two details: Freudian anticipations”.

⁶ See, for example, the following extracts: “And literature enjoyed this affective-sexual transfer, with all his [of Machado de Assis] spirit of sacrifice” (Valerio, 1930, p.91); or: “And thanks to this repression of complexes, Machado de Assis substituted his sexual tendencies and impulses for literary works that left us his psyche, always Freudian” (p.111). Note, as well, the frequent use of the adjective ‘Freudian’ to qualify obsessions, characters, ideas, the conscious, suspicion, hereditary tendencies, excitability, longings, sufferings, affections, appetites, expression, problems, sorrow, doubt, temperament, egoism, human souls etc.

⁷ According to Peregrino Jr. (1938, p.143-146), in Machado de Assis’s last books, the images and phrases are repeated three times, as in the following examples: “It has to always be the same thing ... always the same thing ... always the same thing”, or “I’m inclined to be solitary, quiet, hard working”, or “I found a charming, inventive, mischievous boy”. The author fills his book with four pages of examples of this kind.

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