Machado de Assis em Linha – Universidade de São Paulo
http://machadodeassis.fflch.usp.br – Dossiê: *Machado de Assis e as literaturas de língua inglesa*

THE BUTTERFLY MAN: MACHADO DE ASSIS, CHARLES LAMB, AND THE PERSONAE IN BRITISH PERIODICAL ESSAYS

DANIEL LAGO MONTEIRO
Universidade Estadual de Campinas
Campinas, São Paulo, Brasil

Abstract: This article aims to examine the butterfly man persona who roves from topic to topic with seeming inattention, but concealed choice, in Machado de Assis' series of chronicles "The Week", in Charles Lamb's *Essays of Elia*, and in previous British periodical essayists. The comparison of the periodical writer to a small flying animal has a long history in essay writing and was acknowledged by Machado in his mature years, at a time when he fully mastered the genre of chronicle and had acquired a far-reaching knowledge of British periodical literature. Therefore, in this paper, the butterfly man would stand for a mode of thinking and writing about the ephemerides of everyday life.
Keywords: Machado de Assis; Charles Lamb; periodical essays; chronicles.

O HOMEM-BORBOLETA: MACHADO DE ASSIS, CHARLES LAMB E AS PERSONAS EM ENSAIOS DE PERIÓDICOS BRITÂNICOS

Resumo: *O presente artigo propõe examinar a persona do homem-borboleta, que esvoaça de assunto a assunto com aparente descuido, mas propósito oculto, na série de crônicas de Machado de Assis, "A Semana", nos Ensaios de Elia, de Charles Lamb, e em ensaístas de periódicos britânicos anteriores. A comparação do escritor de periódicos com pequenos animais que voam tem uma longa história que era conhecida por Machado em seus anos de maturidade, numa época em que ele possuía pleno domínio do gênero crônica e adquirira um vasto conhecimento da literatura de periódicos britânicos. Assim, neste artigo, o homem-borboleta corresponderá a um modo de pensar e escrever sobre as efemérides do dia a dia.*
Palavras-chave: *Machado de Assis; Charles Lamb; ensaios de periódicos; crônicas.*

Machado de Assis em Linha – Universidade de São Paulo
http://machadodeassis.fflch.usp.br – Dossiê: *Machado de Assis e as literaturas de língua inglesa*

To Phillip Lopate,
for our talks and rambles about town.

On the 24th of April 1892, Machado de Assis began a new series of chronicles in *Gazeta de Notícias* with the title "The Week". This was his last, longest, and most famous series. Unlike the previous ones, "The Week" appeared with no signature, not even the initials (*M.A.* or *M-as* in some of his earliest chronicles) nor the presence of a putative name like Policarpo, from "Good Mornings!" This aspect is interesting when one considers that in most previous cases Machado employed the use of pseudonyms (Manassés, Eliazar, Lélio etc.), with an aim, contends Ana Flávia Cernic Ramos, to "provide a unity to texts […], to create a critical distance between author and narrator, and to attribute a literary status to quotidian texts" (2016, p. 49-50).[1] If "The Week" came with no signature, what gave unity to it? One way of answering this question, which I will pursue in this paper, is by looking at a comparison made by the narrator in "The Week" of his ideas on butterflies. In this sense, Machado's persona in "The Week" is, I will argue, that of a butterfly man. The comparison of a writer to a butterfly or a small flying animal does not pertain exclusively to "The Week", and indeed has a long history in periodical and in essay writing. The narrator who abandons the task of commenting on quotidian events to tergiversate with seeming inattention, but concealed choice, has been a mode of writing proper to British periodical essayists since the times of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele's *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, in the early 18th century, and particularly of one of the English essayists Machado was mostly acquainted with, Charles Lamb. Thus, in "The Week", by sparing any signature or fictional name, Machado more openly embodies the very nature of periodical literature that is not constrained to any single point of view, that can "change its subject in every line" (GLEDSON, 2006, p. 68), and that flutters with promptness and grace to wherever his mind leads him to.

Therefore, I will speak here mostly of "The Week", but I will also resort to other series of chronicles. Moreover, instead of dealing with different issues from this series, my analyses will focus on some that are representative of it as a whole; the same method will be applied to my reading of Lamb. Because my point of

[1] All translations from Portuguese into English are mine.

departure is Machado's adherence to the British periodical essay tradition, a topic that has not been seriously dwelt on by scholars, I will begin by revealing his knowledge of this tradition from two passages in "The Week": one in which he refers to the origins of British periodical essays; another in which he alludes to Lamb.

As a rule, Machado's chronicles expatiate on the weekly political events he read in newspapers. Thus, in the chronicle published on the 21st of June 1896, the political event that he "read in the newspaper yesterday" was the deposition of São Gonçalo's city council. But this event is only mentioned *en passant* and in a fanciful way claiming that if we restore the tradition of the old astrological almanacs, we could have predicted it long ago. "Yes, I believe in almanacs", and he does so because he agrees with Montaigne that "*we rather prowl and turn here and there*".[2] Then, continues the narrator:

> [The almanacs from the 18th century] carried predictions that were read, believed, and certainly accomplished […]. Such as they were, Dean Swift also made up his astrological almanac, which announced many successions more or less grave, some political, other particular, some merely meteorological […]. Among these predictions, he figured the death of John Tartridge, another author of an astrological almanac, on the 29th of March at eleven p.m. I did not see his death certificate, nor did History deal with the disappearance of this character, but a letter published around that time claims that Tartridge's death happened on the very 29th of March, from the announced illness, with a difference in time, it was at five past seven, that is, four hours before it appeared in the almanac. The deceased man tried to contest the news, but the Dean's reply was so complete and lucid that it silenced him forever. I conclude that every other prediction from the year 1708 was accomplished punctually (ASSIS, 2015b, p. 1203-1204).

In this passage, which Machado seems to be quoting by heart, for he mistakes Partridge for Tartridge, the narrator tells readers the very origin of the first periodical essay, *The Tatler* (1709). It all began with a hoax, when Jonathan Swift, in the pseudonym of Isaac Bickerstaff (a pen name he shared with both Steele and Addison), launched a pamphlet "predicting" the death of the almanac maker John Partridge for the 29th of March 1708. This story is told in the pamphlet itself and is summarized in *The Tatler* no.1, April 12, 1709, written by Steele. The

[2] I did not find this quotation in Montaigne. It seems Machado is making use of a general idea present in Montaigne's essays.

hoax, however playful or merely a "trifle", was not unintentional: "as I have elsewhere observed, [Partridge's] art is gone, the man is gone" (1998, p. 54). In other words, it had a concealed purpose of discouraging readers from reading astrological almanacs and preparing the ground for launching a journalistic innovation: the periodical essay. When the narrator in "The Week" says that he believes in astrological almanacs, he is, of course, deploying the same playfulness and irony of his British precursors. At the same time, his conclusion that Swift's prediction "was accomplished punctually" is a confirmation, so to speak, that periodical literature, either in the form of the periodical essay or the chronicle, is here to stay.

The reference to Lamb is a more subtle one. It appeared in the chronicle of 14th August 1892. In a butterflylike attitude, the narrator flies across a whole range of topics he read in the newspapers of that week. Some are lightly touched on in one sentence or in a single word, regardless of their political importance; others occupy more than one paragraph, like a butterfly that would linger more on one sap than another. Towards the end of the chronicle, after quoting a long extract from the Bible's *Song of Songs*, he claims: "There is a big word that says all things are pure to those who are pure" (ASSIS, 1996, p. 106). According to Gledson, this passage echoes a letter Lamb wrote to Southey and claims: "this must be Machado's source, for he quotes Lamb, the great essayist, on other occasions" (1996, p. 105-106).[3]

There are three other occasions where Machado explicitly refers to Lamb. In the "Prologue" to the first book edition of *The Posthumous Memoirs of Bras Cubas*, says Brás Cubas: "I have adopted the free form of a Sterne, a Lamb or a Xavier de Maistre" (1881, p. v). Also, in *Posthumous Memoirs*, as noted by Benjamin Woodbridge Jr. (2014, p. 4), the quotation from Sir Thomas Browne in the chapter "Oblivion" is actually taken from "My Relations", in Lamb's *Essays of Elia*. Lastly, in the short story "The Lapse" (1884), Machado quotes in English the following passage from the Elia essay "Two Races of Men": "the open, trusting, generous manners of the other", and here he provides the reference: "the theory of the fine English essayist [Charles Lamb] is true" (ASSIS, 2015a, p. 343-344).

Eugênio Gomes was the first to call attention to the connections between Machado and Lamb. In his pioneer study, *Machado de Assis: English Influences* (1939), there is a chapter dedicated to Lamb. It is a very short chapter (one and a

[3] This is the first letter Lamb wrote to Southey (July 28th, 1798), in which he says: "as friend Coleridge said when he was talking bawdy to Miss_____ 'to the pure all things are pure'" (LAMB, 1905, p. 123). I thank John Gledson for providing the reference to this letter.

half pages) where he refers to the mentioning of Lamb in both the "Prologue" to the first book edition of *Posthumous Memoirs* and the short story "The Lapse". Furthermore, says Gomes: "In Lamb, the Brazilian writer came across a perfect spirit […]. [Lamb] was in English, in short, what Machado came to be in our tongue: a fair writer". Gomes argues that Machado and Lamb shared some "spiritual affinities", particularly their horrors of the countryside and their inclinations to ramblings in every street and alley of their respective cities: London and Rio de Janeiro. Nevertheless, concludes Gomes, "Machado was less inspired by this author than one would have expected" (1976, p. 75-76).

A few decades later, after the publishing of Woodbridge Jr.'s findings, Gomes wrote a more extensive chapter "Lamb and Machado", in *Machado de Assis*. There, says the critic: "albeit my assumption that Machado de Assis owed little to Lamb, a 'close reading' of both authors [like Woodbridge Jr.'s] could certainly awake new echoes…" (1958, p. 100-101). Claiming that Machado read Lamb before or while writing *Posthumous Memoirs*, Lamb's presence, according to Gomes, would have been felt mainly in some short stories published in the aftermath of that masterpiece. Thus, Gomes engages in a close reading of four short stories by Machado ("Common Story", "A Chapter of Hats", "Ezekiel's Idea", and "Those Cousins from Sapucaia!") in connection with some of Lamb's essays. In more recent times, Gledson claims in an introduction to an anthology of Machado's short stories that "[Machado] likes authors who tell short fables with an ironic morality – Aesop, La Fontaine, Swift – or those who chose mixt genres, half essay, half fiction, such as Charles Lamb or Thomas Carlyle" (2006, p. 35-36); and Daniel Monteiro in the paper "'Étude sur L'Humour': Charles Lamb in Machado de Assis's Library" investigates the philosophical and literary grounds of English humour and of Lamb's works from a French edition of Lamb that Machado kept in his library. In this edition, the translator, Louis Dépret, presents an extensive account of English humour, contends that Lamb was a quintessential humourist and that his humour is defined by a close alliance between laughter and melancholy, like the one we find in *Posthumous Memoirs* (2021, p. 1-16).

From this brief reassessment, we can see that special attention has been given either to *Posthumous Memoirs* or to Machado's short stories. As important as these connections are, I believe that Lamb's presence in Machado's work is more distinctively found in the light and concise genres of periodical essays and chronicles and in the persona of the butterfly man.

Perhaps, one of the chronicles from "The Week" that best illustrates the narrator's persona as a butterfly man is the one in which he compares his ideas to

butterflies. Published on the 19th of February 1893, the chronicle begins with the following words:

> It is my old habit to wake up early in the morning and look at my beautiful roses, myrtle fresh, and the butterflies that from everywhere fly to love my garden. I have a special love for butterflies. I find in them something like my ideas, which go with equal promptness or else with equal grace. But let us leave aside self-praises; let us go to what happened to me yesterday morning.
> The more I was lost gazing at a butterfly and at an idea, standing in the front garden, I heard a voice from the street, by the gate:
> "Excuse me". (ASSIS, 1996, p. 199).

Once hearing a voice from the street, his idea escaped him: "It dressed a pale blue wing with yellow spots, golden colour". By an association of ideas, the gold colour diverts the narrator's original idea into a piece of news he read about the banker Oberndoerffer who framed a plan to solve the scandal involving the French public administration in the building of the Panama Canal: "They paid him two million francs for this idea […]. If I had the same idea, I would not sell it for less". The idea was to issue lottery tickets, which again, by an association of ideas, transports the narrator to another idea that if it was his would have made him rich, namely, the creation of *jogo do bicho* (ASSIS, 1996, p. 199).

Lost as he was in these butterflylike ideas that crossed his mind, he looked at the gate again and "encountered a thin man, unknown, who repeated in a whisper: 'Excuse me'". Carnival had just been over, and the narrator assumes the man to be "a carnival relic: a crass error because carnival relics go where old moons go to". Now his idea dresses with a moth's gloomy wing and colour about the time when romantic poets sang to old moons, namely, old lovers. Here he quotes a line from an unknown Portuguese poet, and another from the French romantic poet Alfred de Musset, "Ballad to the Moon". Turning again to the man standing at his gate, "I saw […] he carried a paper in his hand […] that he said it was for me" (ASSIS, 1996, p. 200). Being "a sad scribbler of trifling things" (ASSIS, 1996, p. 110), the narrator assumes the paper to be a telegram, and, once more, tergiversates into other ideas, this time about telegrams he lately read concerning the imprisonment of Mr. Lousada, in Blumenau. These telegrams chime in the narrator's mind with "recollections of childhood when I used to go to the theatre to watch an old comedy by Scribe, *The Italian Straw Hat*". Written by Eugène Marin Labiche and not by Eugène Scribe, this play, notes Gledson, was indeed very popular around the time Machado was a child. After having been distracted by

butterfly ideas that transported the narrator to different places and times, he, at last, addresses the man at the gate: "'Telegram?' I asked. 'No, sir'. Said the man. 'Letter?'. 'Also no. A paper'" (ASSIS, 1996, p. 199-201).

Here the chronicle finally comes to its immediate topic, namely, a new system of the jurisdiction where every landowner had to affix a new sign. According to Gledson, in this chronicle, Machado is exposing the flaws of the system, and he does so, as usual, through whimsical and humorous storytelling. "I turned my eyes to the paper and soon saw it was not for me, but for my neighbour. It doesn't matter, it had been opened, and I could read it. It was a subpoena from the municipal administration". He also found out that the neighbour had to pay "one thousand and five hundred *réis*" in the following three days, otherwise he would pay a "thirty thousand *réis* fine", and "in case of reoccurrence", the fine would double in price, and the person "would have to spend eight days in prison". Then, concludes the narrator: "if Xavier de Maistre, in forty-two days in prison, wrote a masterpiece, if I am put into prison because of a sign, why would I not write another?". Here lies the flaw, not only the government employee mistook the narrator for his neighbour, but also the narrator heard from two friends who did not pay the fine and were never sent to prison: "What a disaster! Just when I was beginning to think it useful" (ASSIS, 1996, p. 201-202).

This chronicle is exemplary of the author's contribution to "The Week" in many ways. It presents a first-person narrator with some distinguished traits: one who wakes up early in the mornings, who is the owner of a house big enough to have a front garden, who indulges in rambling ideas and in self praises, and who likes to display his erudition, having quoted from or alluded to Musset, Labiche, and de Maistre. It also presents an intimate dialogue, in a familiar tone, between the narrator and readers; again, an aspect it shares with British periodical essays. The conclusion of the chronicle with the reference to de Maistre's *A Journey around my Room* suggestively refers readers to *The Posthumous Memoirs*. As we shall see later and in connection with another of Machado's chronicles, this conclusion may also refer to the other name mentioned in the "Prologue" to the first edition of Machado's masterpiece, Lamb. I will come back to this point later. For now, let us turn to British periodical essayists' personae and the comparison of their craft with small flying animals.

Since the times of *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, British periodical essayists employed the use of pseudonymous that "combined the figure of the newspaper journalist with the fictional idea of character" (GIGANTE, 2021, p. 150). As well as having adopted the fictional name of Isaac Bickerstaff, Swift, Steele, and Addison peopled *The Spectator*'s club with characters such as Sir Roger De Coverley,

Andrew Freeport, Will Wimble, Will Honeycomb, all of them with distinctive character features and who would, from time to time, take hold of the pen and write their own contributions to the press. Following up on the popularity of *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, some of the most reputed 18th-century British writers (such as Samuel Johnson, Oliver Goldsmith, and Henry Mackenzie) created their serial personae whose names (*The Rambler*, *The Idler*, *The Adventure*, *The Bee*, *The Mirror* etc.) "gave the periodical its name and personality" (GIGANTE, 2021, p. 150). If all these personae were endowed with peculiar features, they all whimsically hover over topics in words and deportments that are akin to Machado's narrator in "The Week". From its title, Goldsmith's *The Bee* is the quintessential bee or butterfly man, which is announced and described in *The Bee* no. 1 (October 6, 1759): "Like the bee, which I have taken for the title of my paper, I would rove from flower to flower, with seeming inattention, but concealed choice, expatiate over all the beauties of the season, and make my industry my amusement" (GOLDSMITH, 1893, p. 3).

Denise Gigante argues that the image of the bee has a long history in essay form that dates back, at least, to Seneca. She quotes a passage from Seneca's *Moral Epistles* where the Roman essayist says: "We should follow, men say, the example of the bee, who flits and culls the flowers that are suitable for producing honey" (GIGANTE, 2021, p. 154). To add something to Gigante's account, Montaigne, perhaps the author in modern times who most closely followed Seneca, asserts the same idea: "Bees ransack flowers here and flowers there: but then they make their own honey, which is entirely theirs and no longer thyme or marjoram" (2003, p. 171); and Francis Bacon, who inaugurates the essay tradition in Britain, also dwells on the comparison of the bee's making of honey with mankind's production of knowledge: "the practice of the bee […] draws materials from the flowers of both garden and field, but transmutes and digests them by a faculty of its own" (1859, p. 433). Back to Gigante's more immediate research, namely, the periodical persona adopted by Lamb's friend, Leigh Hunt, she reminds us that Hunt opened his series *The Indicator*, on October 13th, 1819, by claiming that the name of his persona had been borrowed from "Cuculus indicator […] or Honey Bird" that "hovers over a hollow tree containing the honey" (1822, p. 1). The transition from the bee to a honey bird is significant in the sense that the modern essayist is less one who transmutes and digests what he or she gathered from different materials to produce something new of their own making and more one who hovers over the topics with seeming carelessness or who simply *indicates* their findings and ideas to readers. Nevertheless, the belletrist writer of periodical

essays is "the man of taste [who] collected beauties – on shelves, in commonplace books, and in the storage cells of a cultivated mind" (GIGANTE, 2021, p. 155).

But the first time that a periodical writer was compared to a butterfly would happen a few decades later, not in England, but in France. In a paper on the subject, Lúcia Granja analyses the French mediatic innovation of *bas-de-page*, namely, occupation of space in newspapers' pages dedicated to general topics, *faits divers*. Moreover, she recalls that from the first *feuilleton*, *La Presse*, written on 1st June 1836, "Frédéric Soulié compares the *feuilleton* […] to a small flying animal", more specifically, to a butterfly, and argues: "Hummingbird or butterfly, *feuilleton* or *feuilleton* writer captures the different subjects of the week and hovers over them". Furthermore, Granja contends that if the French *feuilleton* were closer to straightforward comments on political events, the Brazilian *feuilleton* "would preserve politics, but would follow the path of invention" (2015, p. 98). In this line, when Machado's narrator in "The Week" associates his ideas with butterflies that "go with equal promptness or else with equal grace", comments on the weekly events in a fanciful or whimsical way, and in the same series where he tells readers about the origins of British periodical essay, mentions Montaigne and alludes to Lamb, he seems to be merging the French mediatic innovation of *bas-de-page* with a long tradition of essay writing.

Unlike Machado, Hunt, and his essayist predecessors, Lamb does not make use of a related simile. However, his most famous periodical persona, Elia, behaves like a butterfly man in his rambling ideas. This was acknowledged by the famous Victorian critic, George Saintsbury, who speaks of Lamb as one who "is as indefinable as it is inimitable, and his matter and method defy selection and specification as much as the flutterings of a butterfly" (1906, p. 183). By way of example and following Gomes' recommendation that a *close reading* could certainly awake new echoes between Machado and Lamb, I will speak now of the Elia essay "The Convalescent" also in connection with a chronicle Machado wrote for "Good Mornings!"

Elia appeared in the *London Magazine* in August 1820. From that month until August 1825, the magazine published a total of fifty-five essays signed by Elia; later, he would continue writing essays with the same signature in other periodicals. Although *Essays of Elia* can be interpreted in many ways as an encoded autobiography, Lamb endeavoured to preserve the autonomy of his persona. In 1823, the Elia essays were first published in book form with the title: *Elia, Essays which have Appeared under that Signature in the London Magazine*, and in 1833 he published: *The Last Essays of Elia. Being a Sequel to Essays Published under that name*. What most strikes us in both Elia essays' book editions is the complete

omission of Lamb's name. As a matter of fact, it was only after his death, in 1835, that *Essays of Elia* was first published under Lamb's name. This does not mean that readers, especially his friends and acquaintances, were unaware of the man behind that signature or that name. But he was skilful in attributing distinguishing character traits to his pen name. Like the 18th-century British periodical essayists or Machado's narrator in "The Week", Elia is a humorous figure who roves from topic to topic and who is constantly making use of "bookish parody" (LOPATE, 2003, p. vii-xx).

"The Convalescent", published in July 1825, begins by presenting exactly what the title indicates, the narrator in a state of convalescence:

> A PRETTY severe fit of indisposition which, under the name of nervous fever, has made a prison of me for some weeks past; and is but slowly leaving me, has reduced me to an incapacity of reflecting upon any topic foreign to itself. Expect no healthy conclusions from me this month, reader; I can offer you only sick men's dreams (LAMB, 1987, p. 208).

Henceforward, he engages in an essayistic reflection on the "state of sickness", on how it "enlarges the dimensions of a man's self to himself"; in other words, how sickness is a "supreme selfishness". Nothing else matters to a sick person: "What passes out of door […] affects him not"; "To the world's business he is dead"; "Household rumours touch him not". When he is attended by a doctor, "even in the lines of that busy face he reads no multiplicity of patients", for he conceives the doctor to have none but himself. The convalescent is thus compared to a monarch, "if there be a regal solitude, it is a sick bed". Indeed, says Elia, "the bed of sickness" is a "throne let me rather call it". He is also compared to a politician who "changes *sides*" often: "Now he lies full length, then half-length, obliquely, transversely, head and feet quite across the bed; and none accuses him of tergiversation". He finds a kind of pleasure in his own sickness, "he is his own sympathiser", and, as such, "divides himself, by an allowable fiction, into as many distinct individuals, as he hath sore and sorrowing members". By the by, he closes the curtains and "compassionates himself all over" (LAMB, 1987, p. 208-210).

So far, in my exposition of "The Convalescent", Elia would seem a detached observer and mocker of the sick man's self-congratulation, particularly for the use of the impersonal pronoun "he", quite unusual for Elia. However, as we read through the essay, it becomes clear the pronoun refers to himself; it is Elia, the sick man, "dividing himself, by an allowable fiction", into "many distinct individuals". In a comment to this essay, Phillip Lopate argues that Elia is

dramatizing his pathos for the theatrical purpose of "turning himself into a kind of incredible shrinking narcissist" (1989, p. 276). Indeed, says Elia about the sick man: "the man a world unto himself – his own theatre – 'What a speck is he dwindled into!'". Like the butterfly ideas we saw in Machado's chronicle, Elia is transported to other places and times. Looking at the door that shut him from the world's business, a recollection traverses his mind: "A little while ago he was greatly concerned in the event of a law-suit, which was to be the making or the marring of his dearest friend". Then a whisper is heard about the house that "his friend is ruined", but he cares not. He hears a murmur within the house that gently strikes his ears with ideas of "servants gliding up or down the distant staircase"; he opens his eyes "at the dull stroke of the muffled knocker" and relishes the notion that "inquiries are making after him". The vision of his crumpled bed puts into his mind the idea of a neat bed. Then, in a kind of dream or delirium, he associates "the trimness of the very bed", its wavy surface, with an "oceanic surface". Now the sick man is transported to the sea, his bed is turned into a "*Mare Clausum*", from which he sinks "then to be lifted into it again". Lost in these "sick man's dreams", he descends into "caverns of vast hidden suffering" to which "Philoctetes is become an ordinary personage" (LAMB, 1987, p. 209-211). The reference to the Greek hero who was imprisoned on a desert island, together with quotations in Latin and other allusions to Classical mythology, is a display of erudition (a trademark of essayists and of Machado's chronicles), but it has a concealed choice. As Simon Hull rightly observed, literary monthlies such as *London Magazine* attempted "to mix high and low cultural forms" while mirroring "the transience and ephemerality of the city that spawned them" (2010, p. 21-22). Elia's sickness is a transient and ephemeral event. However, he describes this event as making use of high cultural forms, thus turning them into something ordinary.

The essay ends with Elia reaching "terra firme", namely, with a note from his editor requesting an article for the magazine's next issue. This note "seemed to link me on again to the petty business of life […]; a gentle call to activity, however trivial". If the essay begins with Elia telling his readers: "Expect no healthy conclusions from me this month" (also a reminder of his commitment to periodical publication), it ends with the narrator assuring his boss that he is ready for his call: "you have me once again in my natural pretensions – the lean and meagre figure of your insignificant Essayist" (LAMB, 1987, p. 212).

In Machado's chronicle analysed above, the narrator is mainly occupied with the butterflylike ideas that crossed his mind in that narrow space of time from hearing a voice by the gate to reading the document presented by the government official. The chronicle finishes with the narrator saying wryly in self-praise that if

he was sent to prison, he would write a masterpiece like de Maistre's *A Journey around my Room*. The chronicle may not be a similar masterpiece, but it is an accomplished piece, however trivial, of a journey around his head. Similarly, "The Convalescent" claims in the opening paragraph that the sickness "made a prison of me" and allusively in self-praise turns his sick bed into the island where Philoctetes was imprisoned. In this sense, the essay is nothing but a journey around his bed.

The reference to Lamb in this chronicle is subtle but it has a concealed choice. In both cases, we encounter a narrator who ironically imagines himself imprisoned having to write a masterpiece (or indeed writing one) and whose ideas transport them to different places and times. However, in another chronicle, published on the 22nd October 1888, the indication of Elia's convalescence is more explicit:

> Do you notice any difference in me? I must be pale, I get up from the bed, and if it was not for *Brazilian Star Tailoring*… I mean, Carambá's syrup, I would still be lying there. I could tell my sickness; there is no finer pleasure to convalescents than to refer to all the stages of illness, to its crises, pains, and medicines; and if the listener travels by tram, ruminating on something, then the narration never ends. Relax, I will not tell you what happened: I limit myself to greeting you (ASSIS, 2008, p. 179).

By the time this chronicle was published, Machado had already mentioned Lamb in the three passages quoted above. The assurance that the convalescent has a fine pleasure in his illness goes along the same lines we read in Elia and may have been the inspiration for the chronicler when he found himself in a similar condition. Moreover, both narrators struggle to sit down to their tasks of writing for the periodical press, and, because they are absorbed in themselves, tergiversate or moan about their state of health. Thus, the chronicler hovers over topics he only found out through reading newspapers, for he lies "sick in bed, groaning", hoping to finish his task as soon as possible, "because this small effort is disturbing the head" (ASSIS, 2008, p. 180).

The chronicler's commitment is not the same as the monthly essayist. As we have seen in Granja's analyses, the 19th-century Brazilian chronicler would comment on weekly facts, mostly political. But, in the case of Machado, the chronicler quite often bypassed them "by the whimsical loopholes of humour to which many times he appealed to" (BROCA, 1983, p. 33-34). Whereas Lamb, argues Hull, "represented a parodic engagement with the anxiety-ridden figure of

the periodical writer" (2010, p. 21). He was, indeed, subjected to the fast-track pace of periodical writing, and many of Elia's essays are immediately concerned with a monthly festivity or with things he read in the *London* or in other magazines. But he was not, like Machado, committed to debating political events. These events, in the chronicle of the 22nd of October 1888, as in other chronicles, are often bypassed by "the whimsical loopholes of humour", and this time the narrator has a warrant to do so, for (in his sick bed) he did not see them, while readers "probably did not miss" them. Eventually, the narrator loosely comments on several facts he read in the newspapers, but he does so eagerly wanting to get rid of them as soon as possible: "Let us move ahead or, better saying, let us move to the end". This is not because he does not have things to say: "I don't lack subjects", but because "convalescents must be prudent if they want to rhyme with themselves" (ASSIS, 2008, p. 179-180). Here the narrator supposes he is not the only convalescent in the world, and, in this sense, he is quite different from the shrinking narcissists in the Elia essay. But there is in both a recognition that to write for the press under an illness is to rhyme with oneself; a kind of state that gives a further license to tergiversate, to escape in butterflylike ideas that cross one's mind.

To read any of the 248 chronicles Machado wrote for "The Week" is to find an author well-versed and at ease with a genre that he had learned to craft since the late 1850s. The suppression of a signature or a pseudonym poses readers with a harder task in grasping a coherence to a narrator who shifts his focus as whimsically as the flutterings of a butterfly. If this aspect is present in all of Machado's series of chronicles, it assumed new outlines when, in his mature years and with a far-reaching knowledge of British periodical essays, he presented a narrator whose most distinguishing feature is precisely that of a butterfly man. In British periodical essayists, particularly in Lamb, Machado came across a literary form where the ephemerides of quotidian life were at the head of their agenda but, at the same time, did not constraint them. Thus, periodical essayists or chroniclers could, without further ado, drop the subject at hand, mount on a butterfly wing, and, in a narrow space of time (for their lives are short), go wherever their whims take them to.

References

ASSIS, Machado de. *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas*. Rio de Janeiro: Tipografia Nacional, 1881.

_____. *A Semana*. Introdução e notas de John Gledson. São Paulo: Editora Hucitec, 1996.

_____. *Bons Dias!* Introdução e notas de John Gledson. 3. ed. Campinas: Editora Unicamp, 2008.

_____. *Obra completa*. Organização de Aluizio Leite, Ana Lima Cecilio, Heloisa Jahn. São Paulo: Editora Nova Aguilar, 2015a. v. 3.

_____. *Obra completa*. Organização de Aluizio Leite, Ana Lima Cecilio, Heloisa Jahn. São Paulo: Editora Nova Aguilar, 2015b. v. 4.

BACON, Francis. *The Works of Francis Bacon*. Philadelphia: Parry & Macmillan, 1859. v. 1.

BROCA, Brito. *Machado de Assis e a Política mais outros estudos*. São Paulo: Polis, 1983.

GIGANTE, Denise. On Coffee-Houses, Smoking, and the English Essay Tradition. In: KARSHAN, Thomas; MURPHY, Kathryn (Eds.). *On Essays:* Montaigne to the Present. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021. p. 150-166.

GLEDSON, John. *Por um novo Machado de Assis:* ensaios. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2006.

GOMES, Eugênio. *Machado de Assis*. Rio de Janeiro: Livraria São José, 1958.

_____. *Machado de Assis:* influências inglesas. Rio de Janeiro: Pallas, 1976.

GRANJA, Lúcia. Crônica. Chronique. Crónica. *Revista da Anpoll*, Florianópolis, n. 38, p. 86-100, 2015.

GOLDSMITH, Oliver. *The Bee & Other Essays*. London: J. M. Dent, 1893.

HULL, Simon. *Charles Lamb, Elia and the London Magazine*. London; New York: Routledge, 2010.

HUNT, Leigh. *The Indicator*. London: Printed for Jeseph Appleyard, 1822.

LAMB, Charles. *Elia & Last Essays of Elia*. Ed. Jonathan Bate. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

_____. *Essays of Elia*. Foreword by Phillip Lopate. Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2003.

LOPATE, Phillip. Bachelorhood and its Literature. In: *Bachelorhood: Tales of the Metropolis*. New York: Poseidon Press, 1989. p. 249-281.

MONTAIGNE, Michel de. *The Complete Essays*. Translated by M. A. Screech. 3 ed. London: Penguin Books, 2003.

MONTEIRO, Daniel Lago. "Étude sur l'humour": Charles Lamb na Biblioteca de Machado de Assis. *Machado de Assis em Linha*, São Paulo, n. 14, p. 1-16.

RAMOS, Ana Flávia Cernic. *As Máscaras de Lélio:* política e humor nas crônicas de Machado de Assis (1883-1886). Campinas: Editora Unicamp, 2016.

SAINTSBURY, George. *A History of the Nineteenth Century Literature (1780-1895)*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1906.

The Commerce of Everyday Life: Selections from The Tatler and The Spectator. Ed. Erin Mackie. Boston and New York: Bedford Cultural Editions, 1998.

WOODBRIDGE JR., Benjamin Mather. Sir Thomas Browne, Lamb e Machado de Assis. *Machado de Assis em Linha*, São Paulo, v. 7, n. 13, p. 1-4, jun. 2014. Disponível em: <http://machadodeassis.net/download/numero13/artigo01.pdf>. Acesso em: 26 ago. 2020.

DANIEL LAGO MONTEIRO have a bachelor's degree in History, from the University of São Paulo (2005), where I also obtained a master's degree in Philosophy (2010), and a Ph.D. degree in Literary Theory and Comparative Literature (2016). During the Ph.D., I was a visiting research scholar at Birkbeck College, University of London, in the Department of English, and a Fulbright scholar in the Department of English, at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. I have published the book: *No Limiar da Visão: a poética do sublime em Edmund Burke* (Editora LiberArs, 2018). Currently, I hold a post-doctoral fellowship at the State University of Campinas (Unicamp) (2020-2022), where I carry out comparative research between the 19th-century English familiar essay and Brazilian "crônicas", and I was visiting research fellow in the Institute of Advanced Studies at University College London (UCL) (2021-2022). Orcid: 0000-0001-6520-087X. E-mail: daniel.l.monteiro@hotmail.com; d.monteiro@ucl.ac.uk.

Recebido: 16.08.2022
Aprovado: 04.10.2022