

O LAPSO: ECHOES OF CHARLES LAMB IN THE SCIENCE OF PAYING

VIVIANE CARVALHO DA ANNUNCIÇÃO

University of Cambridge - CULP
 Cambridge, United Kingdom

Abstract: This article analyses the short story ‘O Lapso’ (1883). It demonstrates how Machado de Assis connects social medicine and the capitalist system via a quote by the early Romantic writer Charles Lamb. Resorting to a fragmentary and ironic narrative style, the narrator recollects the story of how the Dutch doctor Jeremias Halma cures the nobleman Nicolau of a fantastic disease which prevents him from understanding why he has to pay for services. Through intricate intertextual references, Machado demonstrates how Imperial capitalism reduces social relations to an intense game of competition and self-interest, which characterises the coloniality of power in nineteenth-century Brazil.

Keywords: social medicine; capitalismo; Machado de Assis; Charles Lamb.

O Lapso: Ecos de Lamb na Ciência do Pagamento

Resumo: O presente artigo analisa o conto ‘O Lapso’ (1883) e demonstra como Machado de Assis associa a medicina social ao sistema capitalista por meio de uma citação do autor Romântico Charles Lamb. Com um estilo fragmentário e irônico, o autor narra a história de como o médico holandês Jeremias Halma cura o fidalgo Nicolau de sua doença fantástica que o impossibilita de compreender o porquê ele deve pagar pelos produtos que consome. Através de referências intertextuais, Machado demonstra como o capitalismo imperial reduz interações sociais a competição e interesse, o que caracteriza a colonialidade de poder no século XIX, no Brasil.

Palavras-chave: Medicina social; capitalismo; Machado de Assis; Charles Lamb.

In a chronicle published in the periodical *A Semana* on the 1st of September 1895, the literary persona of Machado de Assis comments on the punishment of a British professor in Guinea for the crime of anthropophagy. Interested in examining the dichotomy between civilisation and barbarity, Machado quotes Jonathan Swift’s *A Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of Poor People from Being a Burthen to their Parents or Country, and for Making them Beneficial to the Public* (1729), most widely

referred to as *A Modest Proposal*, in which Swift ironically suggests that the burden of hunger in Ireland should be alleviated with the consumption of young children. Both the English professor in Guinea and the quote by Swift are tools for Machado to question how the colonial discourse of advancement and progress is used to justify brutal acts and measures. Interestingly enough, Machado de Assis cites an English professor on a foreign mission and a British writer, connecting imperial enterprises to a long history of power struggles and domination. Such a connection also leads one to ask: how does Machado adapt and adjust British literary and political meanings to the Brazilian context? Intending to answer this question, this article aims to analyse the short story "O lapso," which centres around a quote by English writer Charles Lamb taken from the essay "Two Races of Men" (1823). Through a close reading of the story, along with its socio-historical context and intertextualities, I will demonstrate that ideas of science, technology and progress were deeply intertwined with the rise of capitalism and its post-colonial biopolitical project of national advancement.

"O lapso" was released in *Gazeta de Notícias* in April 1883, and it presents the account of the Dutch doctor Jeremias Halma, who finds a cure for the nobleman Tomé Gonçalves, who suffers from a mysterious illness that prevents him from understanding or recognising the concept of payments and debts. It presents a diligent Dutch doctor and discusses an uncanny health condition, whose roots lie hidden or repressed in social structures. At the same time, it depicts the efforts of a mildly competent doctor to cure his patient by demonstrating how diseases affect social and interpersonal relations. Halma resorts to didactic strategies to treat his patients, such as having meetings with the creditors who are mad at Tomé and teaching Tomé himself how to buy and to pay. Halma's methods are so effective that his patient becomes an exemplary citizen, paying for every service he requests. The main irony of the treatment is that neither Tomé nor the other people who ask for his help actually pay for the doctor's services. The approximation of medicine and socio-economic exchanges alludes to an emerging social structure: the interconnectedness of social medicine and the capitalist system.

In the short story, social medicine and the capitalist system are symbolically connected via the quote by the early Romantic writer Charles Lamb taken from the essay "Two Races of Men", published in the collection *Essays of Elia* (1823). In the essay, Lamb, under the literary pseudonym of Elia, argues lenders are sad and hesitant, while borrowers are generous and provide entertainment and feasts to their friends. The quote, reproduced in

Machado's text in English, "the open, trusting, generous manner of the other" (ASSIS, 1959, p. 374) alludes to the expansive and carefree attitude of those who are "naturally" prone to spending. The intertextual reference sets the stage for an opposition between the two "races" of men in "O lapso": those who sadly and confidentially meet and are enraged for being owed to; and Tomé and his friends, who blissfully and publicly share a roast dinner, but who have not paid for the bird they eat.

The word "race" is quite telling, since in the nineteenth century Brazil, as historian Roberto Machado argues, the biological and medical "production" of a new type of individual and society, or ontogenesis and phylogenesis, was intrinsically connected to the rise of capitalism even before the industrialisation of the country. Therefore, the governmental project "medicina social" – or social medicine – played a pioneering role in advancing a causal relationship between health and culture (MACHADO et al., 1978, p. 156). Geographer Gisele Almeida states that not only were individuals targeted by social medicine but also the city and its surroundings. Almeida stresses that the state was responsible for a civilisation project that created the material conditions to reproduce a bourgeoisie-centred urban space (MACHADO, 2011). Sociologist Gabriel Pugliese argues that the transformation of the colony's social and populational environment was connected to an imperial spatial exchange in which both the "weak" colonial individual and the insalubrious city needed to be reinvented. It was, therefore, the task of the doctor, as socio political agent, to introduce "novos hábitos no mundo luso-brasileiro, 'onde residem valetudinários e frouxos', doentes e incapazes de contribuir com a sociedade" (2020, p. 243). Following these critics' socio-historical approaches, we see the connections between the emergence of social medicine and an imperial project of obedience and surveillance. Accordingly, at the service of "order and progress", citizens were encouraged (or coerced), either physically and/or ideologically to follow specific behavioural guidelines to allow an imported but also domestic capitalist system to flourish. When observed in this historical light, "O lapso" presents a fundamental contradiction: if Tomé represents the new bourgeoisie, why does he have problems following the market's guidelines, paying even the minimum for the services he receives? Furthermore, why does the doctor target Tomé instead of the tradesmen, who are the supposed "valetudinarians" for colonial authorities?

To answer these questions, it is essential to consider that "O lapso" presents a series of narrative strategies – one of which is the intertextuality

with Lamb – that expose the problematic relationship between medicine and the proto capitalist-colonial project of civilisation.

"O lapso" takes place in 1768, when social medicine began to emerge in the colony's public policies. Such a temporal displacement contributes to the story's anachronistic estrangement, inasmuch as its themes and plot refer to the nineteenth century. The form in which the narrator frames the narrative also generates a sense of estrangement, doubt and scepticism. Linguist Miriam Bauab Puzzo (2008/2009, p. 226) argues that the narrator of the story presents a "modo dúbio de narrar... afirma e nega, duvida das próprias palavras, como se dialogasse com seu duplo, com o outro que o constitui." Similarly, literary critic Ivo Barbieri (2001, p. 335-348) affirms that the narrator creates a narrative patchwork in which quotations and ideas are removed from their original context and pieced together in a fragmented fashion. And yet, while the critics point to the ambiguous and fragmented narrative structure of "O lapso," they do not relate them to the emergence of social medicine. Nor do they connect them to the complex ties and tensions between medicine and capitalism, which are translated into social medicine and its philosophical associations. The present analysis complements Puzzo and Barbieri's points by examining linguistic structures, such as the fragmentary organization of the story and its intertextualities, and the relationship between social medicine and capitalist system. The importance of interconnecting language and medicine is a function of the latter's ideological power, which not only changes people's frame of mind and emotions but also supports emerging socio-structures, including economic ones. Structures which, at least partially if not totally condition these very same mental and emotional patterns.

"O lapso" opens with an epigraph from Chapter 42 of the biblical book of Jeremiah. Known as the "weeping prophet," (HILLERS, p. 419) Jeremiah was a messenger from God in the Old Testament who denounced Jerusalem's infidelity and corruption – the causes of its destruction and fall between 627 BCE and 587 BCE. The quotation alludes to the repentance of the people of Israel who, in exile, ask Jeremiah to intervene for them. Instructed by God, Jeremiah advises the Israelites to stay in exile until the destruction of the city and its temple by the Babylonians. The narrator, creating an obvious parallel with the biblical account by naming the doctor "Jeremias," begins the story with a negative: "Não me perguntem pela família do Dr. Jeremias Halma, nem o que é que ele veio fazer ao Rio de Janeiro, naquele ano de 1768, governando o conde de Azambuja, que a princípio se disse o mandara buscar; esta versão

durou pouco” (ASSIS, 1959, p. 372). According to Puzzo (2008/2009), the narrator thus demonstrates that he is affected by memory lapses and cannot recall the details of the physician’s sojourn in Brazil. However, the eponymous narrative lapse is more than a witty reference to the title and Tomé’s illness; it is a veiled emulation of the narrative form of the book of Jeremiah, which according to theologian Robert Davidson (2020) is characterised by a variety of styles, from reflective poetry to oracle and prose, in which visions of destruction are intercalated with words of hope and redemption. “O lapso” emulates this variety of styles by quoting and alluding to different authors and sources of information, as if the narrator could not grasp the entirety or complexity of the situation. Nevertheless, when the narrator’s memory does not lapse, the information given is detailed and specific, such as the description of the Dutch doctor:

Viajara muito, sabia toda a química do tempo, e mais alguma; falava correntemente cinco ou seis línguas vivas e duas mortas. Era tão universal e inventivo, que dotou a poesia malaia com um novo metro, e engendrou uma teoria da formação dos diamantes. Não conto os melhoramentos terapêuticos e outras muitas coisas, que o recomendam à nossa admiração. (ASSIS, 1959, p. 372).

Jeremias Halma embodies the essence of the Renaissance man, whose knowledge of science, mathematics and languages enables him to perceive the world through a “quantitative epistemology,” “which held that such an ideal exhausted everything accessible to human knowing” (DEAR, 1995, p. 1). In the passage quoted above, the new poetic meter he invented, and his theory of diamonds demonstrate a preference for numbers and measures – an important skill in the logic of capitalism. Halma, therefore, represents the vision of a measured, objective and rational medicine – and capitalism – which soberly formulates solutions to physical and mental problems. At the same time, his surname is a homophone of “alma” or “soul” in vernacular Portuguese. The surname suggestively reinforces Jeremias’s psychological qualities, which the narrator summarises as “simples, lhano, modesto.” Contradictorily, “alma” has a lesser-known meaning, “o vazio interior de uma boca de fogo: a alma do canhão,” (ALMA, on-line) which indicates that the doctor may have the power of destruction and war.

After describing Jeremias, the narrator focuses on the patient, the wealthy Tomé Gonçalves, a prosperous “fidalgo” and a politician who seems to have always behaved according to his title and class. However, instead of

gathering knowledge (like the biblical Jeremiah), Tomé accumulates money, debts and, therefore, creditors and rivals since he does not pay for the services or commodities he consumes. Through an impressionistic and vague language, the narrator does not fully explain why Tomé does what he does: "o descuido podia explicar os seus atrasos, a velhacaria também; mas quem opinasse por uma ou outra dessas interpretações, mostraria que não sabe ler uma narração grave" (ASSIS, 1959, p. 373). Instead, the narrator ascribes the diagnosis to Jeremias Halma, the doctor who observes Tomé's gestures during a church ceremony: "esse curioso fenômeno, cuja causa, se a conhecemos, foi porque a descobriu o Dr Jeremias" (ASSIS, 1959, p. 373). The narrator's vagueness regarding Tomé's origin and illnesses contrasts with the doctor's description, which is clear and precise. The contrast creates an uncanny atmosphere, as if the doctor were intervening in a morbid and bizarre case which is difficult to grasp. Then again, the contrast can equally be interpreted as a mode of narrative suspicion since the narrator neither agrees nor disagrees with the doctor but simply reports Jeremias's conclusions and treatment. The narrator of "O lapso" seems to be incredulous, or at least, confused or perplexed by Halma's methods and reasoning.

During a church procession, the narrator focuses on the doctor and two merchants. While Halma carefully observes Tomé piously carrying a canopy, the hairdresser and the tailor consider whether or not to take legal action against Tomé, given that he owes them a substantial amount of money. Overhearing their conversation, Halma asks why they should conspire against a sick man. He then proceeds to invite them to a private meeting to discuss Tomé's illnesses. Not fully trusting Halma, the hairdresser and the tailor invite many of Tomé's creditors to a "conciliábulo," a secret meeting, to decide if it is sensible to trust the doctor. The meeting is the event that triggers the narrative break, in which the narrator quotes Lamb, as cited above, claiming that the lenders are despondent whereas the borrowers are overjoyed.

As Eugênio Gomes (1958, p. 100) argues, the reference to "Two Races of Man," connects Machado's story to the universe of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century English satire. It is basically the same universe that Machado directly references in the "Prologue" of the first edition of *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas* (1881), in which he attributes to Laurence Sterne – as well as Xavier de Maistre – the inspiration for the "forma livre" of his novel. Benjamin Woodbridge Jr. (2014, p. 3) identifies yet another intertextual tie with Lamb's essay "My Relations" in the short chapter "Oblivion" of *Memórias póstumas*. Brás, reflecting on ageing, quotes a nameless Englishman, and

argues that realising that future generations will not remember him is the most challenging ordeal of old age. The preference for humour and satire is one of the elements that draws Machado to the English essayist. Another, arguably, is that both writers shared the perspectives of a servant and the working class. According to Gerald Monsman, Charles Lamb's:

[...] clerk/servant status (his father as well as his mother came from the servant class) may have produced in him something very much like the antagonistic acculturation (adopting the dominant's group means but resisting its goals) of socio-cultural interaction. Like a number of writers, Lamb's purpose is to discredit the norms which the dominant culture assumes by ironising conventional responses for new ends – the really good clerk who 'pens a stanza when he should engross' is not a creature who subordinates his identity to that of his employer. (MONSMAN, 1990, p. 99).

This remark could be applied to Machado de Assis equally, whose literary voice is permeated by an outsider's experience that serves as a critical weapon.

However, in the case of "O lapso," Machado replays Lamb's humorous style to create a broader satire of intellectual discourses that emerged in the eighteenth century. As noted, published in Lamb's *Essays of Elia* (1823), "Two Races of Man" exemplifies the narrator's thesis about the cheerful borrowers and disgruntled lenders with the story of his rich friend, Ralph Bigod, Esq., who never hesitated to spend his money. Hyperbolically comparing Bigod to Alexander the Great, Elia argues that his "regal" intention was "borrowing to borrow," (LAMB, 1962, p. 27) which means that his pleasure derived from the act of borrowing money to lend it to his acquaintances. The merry cycle of borrowing and spending, for Bigod, was secretly connected to the fact he had "a tythe part of the inhabitants under contribution" (LAMB, 1962, p. 27). In other words, Bigod enjoyed having power over his borrowers and lenders since, as the Englishman humorously put it, "money kept longer than three days stinks" (LAMB, 1962, p. 27). The narrator states that he mainly drank and gave his money away until his death. Viewed in the light of Lamb's essay, there is a connection between Bigod and Tomé: both have comfortable lives at the costs of others, borrowing and spending more than they actually have. However, while Bigod seems to borrow from his equals, Tomé takes from his subordinates. Such a difference between characters, apart from conferring a perverse tonality to Machado's story, has the function of laying bare the

contradictions of the higher classes in Brazil, as explained by Roberto Schwarz (2000, p. 42): "Estas [elites brasileiras] se queriam parte do Ocidente progressista e culto, naquela altura já francamente burguês (a norma), sem prejuízo de serem, na prática, e com igual autenticidade, membro beneficiário do último ou penúltimo grande sistema escravocrata do mesmo Ocidente (a infração)."

Schwarz's distinction between the "norm" of Western societies and the "infraction" by Brazilians sheds light upon the disparity between Bigod and Tomé. The fact that Tomé "unwillingly" abuses his subordinates is because unpaid work – or slavery – predominates in "the periphery of capitalism" – to use Schwarz's famous expression. Tomé, behaving as an entitled member of his class, accumulates capital and does not effectively understand why he has to pay for even a minimum of services, given that his attitude is part of a broader social ethos.

While the parallels between Bigod and Tomé allude to the economic exchanges of Western-colonial societies, the quotation by Lamb in "O lapso" has broader social implications. The use of the term "race" in relation to paid and unpaid labour cannot simply be interpreted as a metaphor for a type of behaviour or personality. The narrator of "O lapso," as Ivo Barbieri (2001, p. 344) argues, is also satirically criticising eighteenth- and nineteenth-century racial scientific taxonomies. The criticism of scientific theories, though, is made via Lamb's essays, since in "Imperfect Sympathies" (published in the same collection as "Two Races..."), Elia humorously confesses being a "bundle of prejudices," (LAMB, 1962, p. 68) and proceeds to proffer sardonic remarks about "Scots," "Jews," "Negros" and "Quakers" (LAMB, 1962, p. 68-75). The "bundle of prejudices," though, is not a particular trait of Elia's personality but part of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century social and intellectual *Zeitgeist*. In the eighteenth century, when the story takes place, scientific treatises provided racial hierarchies by which they justified colonial enterprises (SCHWARCZ, 1999, p. 49). According to Lilia Schwarcz (1999, p. 46), these works interpreted humanity according to the contradictory ideas of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution: "[...] once people presumed that freedom and equality were natural, they began to think about the unity of humanity and universality of equality, both of which [they] understood to be natural." The debate about the equality of human beings paradoxically led to the idea that Brazilians and Brazil needed scientific intervention to "improve" "savage" habits and way of life. Such a rationale, as noted previously, guided

social medicine of the nineteenth century, which transformed the medical class into an agent of change. As Roberto Machado et al. (1978, p. 155) argues:

O século XIX assinala para o Brasil o início de um processo de transformação política e econômica que atinge igualmente o âmbito da medicina, inaugurando duas de suas características, que não só têm vigorado até o presente, como têm-se intensificado cada vez mais: a penetração da medicina na sociedade, que incorpora o meio urbano como alvo da reflexão e da prática médicas, e a situação da medicina como apoio científico indispensável ao exercício de poder do Estado.

With the support of medicine, the Brazilian Imperial state arrogated to itself the mission of intervening in society and preventing sickness and abnormalities. Moreover, it intended to transform people's habits and behaviour. In "O lapso," such an enterprise is accomplished by Dr Halma when he cures Tomé. However, the narrator complicates matters by singling out the idea of unpaid labour and by suggesting that Tomé's sickness is a symptom of a broader "infraction" of the burgeoning capitalist order: the endurance of slavery and its scientific and political justifications, since Afro-Brazilians and indigenous populations were seen as inferior.

Machado de Assis foreshadows the intricate ideological and economic interconnections that constitute the "coloniality of power," as developed by Aníbal Quijano. The Peruvian sociologist maintains that since the beginning of the colonisation of America, "Europeans associated nonpaid or non-waged labor with the dominated races because they were 'inferior' races" (QUIJANO, 2000, p. 538). Quijano (2000, p. 539) continues by claiming that "the racial classification of the population and the early association of the new racial identities of the colonised with the forms of control of unpaid, unwaged labor developed among the Europeans the singular perception that paid labor was the whites' privilege".

Even though Quijano focuses on Spanish America, his claim is equally valid for Brazil. Roberto Schwarz makes a similar point when he argues that Brazilian Imperial elites rationalised slavery in ways that sound incongruous today. Schwarz quotes the nineteenth-century politician Bernardo Pereira de Vasconcelos, who claimed that Africa transformed Brazil into a civilised nation because it provided the country with hard-working people, whose labour allowed the offspring of plantation owners to study in European universities and bring science, technology and progress to their lives (SCHWARZ, 2000, p. 42-44). The whole train of thought is flawed, since the

concentration of knowledge¹ and wealth remained – and to a certain extent, remains (ARRAIS, 2019) – in the hands of a small elite. However, the same bizarre and fantastic logic is present in the plot of the story that Machado de Assis slyly devises when he approaches the themes of science, order and progress.

At the same time, in “O lapso,” it is uncanny and unfamiliar that Halma has to cure a man of his unorthodox habit of not paying, yet it is also a familiar fact that wealthy classes often refuse to pay for the services they receive. The doctor, in this sense, is an ambiguous figure: while he wishes to help the workers, he is also a guardian of the dominant order. The fact that he himself is not paid for his services, though, adds an ironic note, a suggestion that perhaps Halma belongs to an “inferior race” that does not deserve to be paid. Or perhaps it is simply an indication that there is always someone at a disadvantage in the broader economic scheme.

The doctor cures Tomé of his memory lapse by giving him a miraculous drug and explaining the laws of the market to him. Methodically and patiently, Jeremias re-enacts and shows the production cycle to Tomé by taking him to tradesmen’s shops and teaching him what is necessary for a shoe or a wig to be made. It is as if the narrator creates an uncanny and ironic de-alienating strategy, which reinforces the capitalist ideology instead of hiding its mechanics. The healing procedure is also allied to Tomé’s name, a reference to the Biblical gospel of John (JOHN..., on-line), which recounts Jesus’s resurrection. In Chapter Twenty, the evangelist emphasises how astounded the disciples were when their master came back from the dead. One of them, Thomas (Tomé), was particularly incredulous, saying that he needed to see and touch Jesus’s hands and side wound to believe he had returned. After appearing to the disciples, Jesus tells Thomas to examine him, who only after doing so, accepts the miracle. In “O lapso,” there is a similarity between Jesus and Jeremias’s methods: they need to use visual and individualised experiences to teach Tomé a lesson, either Christianity or capitalism. Most interestingly, both the disciples and Tomé were warned that Jesus was going to resurrect, however, they did not remember or understand it, as the biblical story elucidates: “[...] for they did not yet understand the scripture that Jesus must rise from the dead” (JOHN..., on-line). Similarly to the biblical Thomas,

¹ Literacy in Brazil was only still around thirty per cent in the 1930s. Differently from Latin America, formal universities began in the same decade and National Research Council, CNPq, now National Council for Scientific and Technological Development – and CAPES, were established in 1950s (BOUND, 2008, p. 22).

Machado de Assis's Tomé requires a practical demonstration of "paying" for him to be convinced that it exists, just as the disciple needed physical proof of the resurrection. Furthermore, Tomé's treatment is preceded by a complete re-enactment of the economic cycle – as capitalism depends on repetition and reproduction – to convince the sick patient of its importance. However, just like the disciples, Tomé knows about "paying," he simply needed to experience it again (numerous times, as the narrator stresses) to be reminded of its existence. Tomé's cure, therefore, involves reactivation of memory as a lived experience.

The connection between experience and memory in Machado de Assis is explored by Sávio Passafaro Peres and Marina Massimi in their analysis of the short stories "Dona Paula" (1884), "Missa do Galo" (1893) and the novel *Dom Casmurro* (1899). For the two critics, the concept of memory in these works is related to an "experiência vivida" in which the recollection of an event is permeated by re-signification and adaptation (PERES; MASSIMI, 2008). In this sense, memory is re-constructed via conscious and unconscious experiences, emotions and language. Without making an explicit connection to Walter Benjamin, Peres and Massimi seem to be alluding to the notion of "memory" as both an individual and collective experience, which Benjamin examines throughout his work. Such an idea deserves some space before we continue discussing "O lapso."

In "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," Benjamin (1968, p. 194) distinguishes two types of experience: *Erfahrung* (experience) and *Erlebnis* ("something lived through"). Following Henri Bergson, Benjamin argues that "experience is indeed a matter of tradition, in collective existence as well as private life. It is less the product of facts firmly anchored in memory than of a convergence in memory of the accumulated and frequently unconscious data" (BENJAMIN, 1968, p. 157). Such an "unconscious" process gives rise to the idea of an "involuntary memory," which is activated via emotions and affections. Benjamin cites Marcel Proust's technique in *À La Recherche du temps perdu* (1913), which "confronts 'involuntary memory' with 'voluntary memory,' one that is in the service of the intellect" (BENJAMIN, 1968, p. 157). The narrator of *À La Recherche...* tastes a pastry called madeleine, which mnemonically "transports" him back to his childhood in Combray. The flavour of the pastry is an external agent of "involuntary memory" which, guided by the attentiveness of the mind, brings to the surface Marcel's experience (*Erfahrung*) as a "longue durée." In contrast to this kind of experience, Benjamin argues that the early twentieth-century city's conurbation has

fundamentally changed the relationship between the individual and memory. Drawing on the studies by Sigmund Freud, Benjamin states that memory fragments “are most powerful and most enduring when the incident which left them behind was one that never entered consciousness,” (BENJAMIN, 1968, p. 160) which means that what becomes an “involuntary memory” has to be experienced unconsciously.

In his reading of Freud, Benjamin (1968, p. 160) argues that memory is supported by other systems, such as consciousness, which although it has no memory function, protects living beings against traumatic stimuli and shocks. Developing the notion of trauma, Benjamin maintains that modern capitalism, emblematised by city life, bombards the individual’s psychology with stimuli, transferring a reified sense of estrangement from mass-production scale to one’s psychic energy. Such a change affects people’s memory, which protects the unconscious from trauma and reduces their memory to “the sphere of a certain hour in one’s life (*Erlebnis*)” (BENJAMIN, 1968, p. 163). In this way, people lose the ability to make connections with a “longue durée,” or the experience and interconnectedness of one’s life. For example, Benjamin scrutinises the poetry of Charles Baudelaire, which brings to the surfaces the shocks, traumas, and wonders of modern life through the figure of the *flâneur*. Baudelaire, in this sense, “gives weight of an experience (*Erfahrung*)” (BENJAMIN, 1968, p. 194) to “something that is ‘lived through (*Erlebnis*)” (BENJAMIN, 1968, p. 194). Therefore, for Benjamin, memory is a complex notion anchored both in a prolonged sensation of a continuation of one’s life through history and communal values (*Erfahrung*) and the modern impressions and shocks produced by large scale capitalism (*Erlebnis*).

Benjamin’s conceptualisation is useful for the understanding of the function of memory in Tomé’s treatment. According to Karyn Ball, Benjamin’s division is part of the German idealistic nostalgia for a pre-modern organic community, where solidarity and shared values endured (BALL, 2015, p. 154). However, the historical changes of the twentieth century made it impossible for individuals to return to a sense of collective belonging and a prolonged sense of memory. For this reason, Baudelaire’s poetic singularity stems “from its ability to enunciate the destruction of collective experience that transpires as capital curtails its range and contents as well as the ‘kind of collective experience that would be transmissible” (BALL, 2015, p. 172). From this perspective, Ball (2015, p. 173) contends that Baudelaire’s work suggests that there is “no real, transmissible, durable experience – that is not mediated by market forces.”

Similarly, in "O lapso," the market seems to prevail – since it is possible to observe that Tomé's memory and treatment, as conceived by the doctor, recapture the individual perception of a collective experience within an economic context of debit and credit. However, there is no affection or involuntary stimuli that cause Tomé to recover and reaffirm his solidarity ties with his community. Instead, what Tomé recovers is something lived through, forged at the core of colonial relations, mediated, and reified by capital forces. In so doing, the doctor triggers the type of memory that needs to be endured: the notion of marketable exchanges translated in short and immediate relations.

At the same time, as Ivo Barbieri proposes, Machado de Assis's construction of memory is related to his reading of the founding father of French clinical psychology Théodule-Armand Ribot. The critic states that the narrator of "O lapso" borrows motifs and cases from Ribot's *Les Maladies de la mémoire* (1881), a volume present in Machado's library. Barbieri focuses on Halma recollection of a Catalan lady who did not recognise her husband, which is inspired by one of Ribot's clinical examples of a man who mistook his wife for his mistress (BARBIERI, 2001, p. 343). However, for Barbieri (2001, p. 343), there is a paradoxical inversion:

Enquanto a exposição do psicólogo apresenta-se como a gravidade de quem pretende ter alcançado uma nova verdade científica e, para enunciá-la, necessita elaborar um discurso coeso e convincente, a narrativa do ficcionalista desmascara, sob a aparência de falsa seriedade, a inconsistência da construção monolítica e presunçosa.

Barbieri suggests that Jeremias's diagnosis is permeated by a satirical emulation of Ribot's studies once the narrator uses the example of the doctor to criticise the "fetishistic" feelings intellectuals had towards the scientific-philosophical discourses of the period (BARBIERI, 2001, p. 345). The use of "fetish" to characterise science is the same word the narrator of the story uses to describe the astonishment of the women who witness the doctor's cure: "Parece coisa de feitiçaria." Such a term brings us back to the concept of collective experience since it recaptures both a sense of historical belonging and colonial enterprises. The etymology of "fetish" comes from the Portuguese "feitiço," and was first employed in the sixteenth century by Portuguese sailors to characterise the religious charms and amulets carried by the populations of the Guinea coast of Africa (FETISH, on-line). A "fetish" or "feitiço" is a "material object regarded with awe as having mysterious powers

or representing a deity that may be worshipped through it" (FETISH, on-line). Considering this in relation to "O lapso," the idea of a science which restores a "sick" man's memory and his ability to pay for the services he requests is akin to miracles and magic. Additionally, the story ends with the doctor being canonised but never monetarily rewarded for his services. Such an approximation of medicine to the supernatural, fantastic events and religious stories goes back to the concept of memory as a re-signification and readaptation of past experiences related to a collective sense of shared values. However, in "O lapso," what is communal is the (hi)story of colonial enterprises, exploration and commerce.

From this point of view, Tomé, the creditors-workers, and the people who witnessed the cure performed by Jeremias belong to a context in which the scientific "powers" of doctors though not fully understood, are nonetheless appreciated –, at least somewhat and even if it is just by a symbolic payment in the form of a religious title.

While "O lapso's" dénouement sheds light on a connection between science, religion and the market, which preserve the laws of capital, the quote by Lamb suggests a broader context of imperialism and domination. One which is not only connected to the Luso-Brazilian world but encompasses the Anglophone Empire. The reference to the Dutch also recalls the three-decade rule of Duke Maurits of Nassau in Recife between the years 1630-1654, who brought an entourage of 46 scientists, physicians and artists (BOXER, 1961, p. 158) to produce a narrative of domination and conquest. A narrative that inspired the English Romantic poet Robert Southey to write his *History of Brazil* (1810-1819), a volume found in Machado de Assis's library. Southey (2012, p. 5) goes as far as to argue that "the mixture and intermixture of three different races, the European, American, and African, had produced new diseases, or at least new constitutions, by which old diseases were so modified, that the skilfullest physicians were puzzled by new symptoms". Southey's assertion is based on the work of the Dutch doctor Willem Piso (1611-1678), who wrote *Historia Naturalis Brasiliae* (1648), one of the earliest comprehensive scientific surveys of Brazilian climate, diseases, medicine, indigenous cultures, flora and fauna.

Although these events might seem to bear little relevance to the work of Machado de Assis, it is significant that the novelist chose to connect the Dutch and the English, Imperialist projects and sciences to represent nineteenth-century Brazil. What the narrator seems to be suggesting is that Halma, with his preference for measures and numbers, can fix a social problem by

endorsing the established order, and the church is an agent in perpetuating its dynamics since it is the institution that rewards the doctor. The initial quotation by Jeremiah seems to connect two symbolic powers which need “prophets” to maintain their legitimacy. Both the doctor and the prophet are psycho-symbolically similar: devoted to their mission, single, sentimental and self-reflective about their role. While the biblical Jeremiah preserved traditional religion, Jeremias Halma secures the capitalist and imperial order; neither, however, receives any acknowledgement in return. The narrator concomitantly caricaturises the profession of medicine as a noble vocation. While Halma successfully cures Tomé and alleviates the social burden of his debts, the doctor is gullible for not understanding the social dynamics of colonial Brazil, which divided the rich and the poor, forcing the latter to rely on canniness to survive. As a doctor, Jeremias is emotional and knowledgeable but, socially, he is naïve and easily deceived, which runs against the grain of a materialistic culture that praised the survival of the fittest or the most resourceful.

Tomé, on the other hand, serves as miraculous proof that medicine can intervene in the social order and improve the situation, after all Tomé paid his creditors. However, how long would it last? What kind of improvement and for whom? These questions seem to be left open, mainly because the narrator, as a forgetful and fragmented (or even “lapsed”) voice, cannot make long and enduring connections: the humorous intertextual patchwork of citations, allied to a fragmented narrative presentation, which echoes Lamb and his essays, attests to the impossibility of a “longue durée.” What is enduring and persistent, however, are the laws of Imperial capitalism, which reduce social relations to an intense game of competition and self-interest. In other words, the coloniality of power in nineteenth-century Brazil.

References

- ALMA. In: DICIO. Available from: <<https://www.dicio.com.br/alma/>>. Access on: 17 Apr. 2021.
- ASSIS, Machado de. *Obras completas - volume II*. Organização de Afrânio Coutinho. Rio de Janeiro: José Aguilar, 1959.
- ARRAIS, Tadeu A. Desigualdade de renda, emprego público e transferências de renda no Brasil contemporâneo. *Mercator*, Fortaleza, v. 18, p. 1-18, 2019. Available from: <<https://doi.org/10.4215/rm2019.e18008>>. Access on: 21 Apr. 2021.

- BALL, Karyn. In Search of Lost Community: The Literary Image between "Proust" and "Baudelaire" in Walter Benjamin's Modernization Lament. *Humanities*, Basel, v. 4, n. 1, p. 149-180, 2015.
- BARBIERI, Ivo. O lapso ou uma psicoterapia de humor. In: JOBIM, José Luís (Org.). *A biblioteca de Machado de Assis*. Rio de Janeiro: ABL; Topbooks, 2001. p. 335-347.
- BENJAMIN, Walter. *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. Translated by Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken, 1968.
- BOUND, Kirsten. *Brazil: the Natural Knowledge Economy*. London: Demos, 2008.
- BOXER, Charles Ralph. *Os holandeses no Brasil: 1624-1654*. Tradução de Olivério M. de Oliveira Pinto. São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1961.
- DAVIDSON, Robert. 'Jeremiah. The Book of', in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, org. by Bruce M. Metzger, & Michael D Coogan. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992 <<https://www-oxfordreference-com.ezp.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780195046458.001.0001/acref-9780195046458-e-0371>> [accessed 24 February 2020]
- DEAR, Peter. *Discipline and Experience: the Mathematical Way in the Scientific Revolution*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- FETISH. In: ONLINE ETYMOLOGY DICTIONARY. Available from: <<https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=fetish>>. Access on: 3 May 2021.
- GOMES, Eugênio. Machado de Assis. Rio de Janeiro: Livraria São José, 1958.
- HILLERS, Delbert, 'Lamentations of Jeremiah, The'. in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed by Metzger, Bruce M. & Michael D. Coogan. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) <<https://www-oxfordreference-com.ezp.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780195046458.001.0001/acref-9780195046458-e-0371>> [accessed 24 February 2020].
- JOHN 20: 1-31. In: THE NET Bible: Scholars Edition. Available from: <<https://bible.org/netbible/>> Access on: 13 Jan. 2021.
- LAMB, Charles. *Essays of Elia*. London: Everyman's Library, 1962.
- MACHADO, Gisele Cardoso de Almeida. A difusão do pensamento higienista na cidade do Rio de Janeiro e suas consequências espaciais. In: SIMPÓSIO NACIONAL DE HISTÓRIA, 26., 2011, São Paulo. *Anais* [...]. São Paulo: ANPUH, 2011. Available from: <https://www.snh2011.anpuh.org/resources/anais/14/1308340710_ARQUIVO_GiseleCardosodeAlmeidaMachado-ANPUH.pdf>. Access on: 13 Jan. 2021.
- MACHADO, Roberto et al. *Danação da norma: medicina social e constituição da psiquiatria no Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: Graal, 1978.
- MONSMAN, Gerald. Charles Lamb's Elia as Clerk: the Commercial Employment of a Literary Writer. *The Wordsworth Circle*, [Boston; New York; Storrs], v. 21, n. 3, p. 96-100, Summer 1990. Available from: <<https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/TWC24044615?journalCode=twc>>. Access on: 13 Jan. 2021.
- PERES, Sávio Passafaro; MASSIMI, Marina. O conceito de memória na obra de Machado de Assis. *Memorandum: Memória e História em Psicologia*, [s. l.], n. 15, p. 20-34, 2008.

Available from:
 <<https://periodicos.ufmg.br/index.php/memorandum/article/view/6681>>. Access on: 13 Jan. 2021.

PUGLIESE, Gabriel. Higiene e a reinvenção da dietética: a economia política da vida na medicina luso-brasileira da passagem do século XVIII para o XIX. *Anuário Antropológico*, DF, v. 45, n. 1, p. 232-248, jan./abr. 2020.

PUZZO, Miriam Bauab. As trapaças linguísticas do narrador machadiano. *Miscelânea: Revista de Pós-Graduação em Letras, Assis*, v. 5, p. 222-238, dez. 2008/maio 2009.

QUIJANO, Aníbal. Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America. *Nepantla: Views from South*, Durham, v. 1, n. 3, p. 533-580, 2000. Translated by Michael Ennis.

SCHWARCZ, Lilia Moritz. *The Spectacle of the Races: Scientists, Institutions and the Race Question in Brazil, 1870-1930*. Translated by Leland Guyer. New York: Hill and Wang, 1999.

SCHWARZ, Roberto. *Um mestre na periferia do capitalismo: Machado de Assis*. São Paulo: Duas Cidades, 2000.

SOUTHEY, Robert. *History of Brazil*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

WOODBRIDGE JR., Benjamin. Sir Thomas Browne, Lamb e Machado de Assis. *Machado de Assis em Linha*, São Paulo, v. 7, n. 13, p. 1-4, jun. 2014. Tradução de Marta de Senna. Disponível em: <<https://www.scielo.br/j/mael/a/gF9QPDqV5BbzFTjk88St4qf/?lang=pt>> [accessed 24 February 2020].

VIVIANE CARVALHO DA ANNUNCIACÃO holds a PhD in English from the University of São Paulo (USP), where she also received a joint degree in Portuguese and English Studies. She has recently completed a second PhD on Machado de Assis's short stories at the University of Cambridge. She currently teaches Portuguese at the Cambridge University Language Centre and is a tutor of Lusophone Studies at the Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages. Her current research interests include Brazilian and Latin American literature and politics and new methodologies in language learning. Orcid: 0000-0001-5981-6256. E-mail: vc318@cam.ac.uk.

Recebido: 21.10.2022

Aprovado: 25.11.2022