Posthumous Persona(r)e:

Machado de Assis, Black Writing, and the African Diaspora Literary Apparatus

by

Damien-Adia Marassa

Department of English

Duke University

Date:_______________________

Approved:

___________________________

Frederick C. Moten, Supervisor

___________________________

Priscilla Wald, Supervisor

___________________________

Joseph Donahue

___________________________

Nathaniel Mackey

___________________________

Justin Read

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of English in the Graduate School of Duke University

2018
ABSTRACT

Posthumous Persona(r)e:
Machado de Assis, Black Writing, and the African Diaspora Literary Apparatus

by

Damien-Adia Marassa

Department of English
Duke University

Date:_______________________
Approved:

___________________________
Frederick C. Moten, Supervisor

___________________________
Priscilla Wald, Supervisor

___________________________
Joseph Donahue

___________________________
Nathaniel Mackey

___________________________
Justin Read

An abstract of a dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of English in the Graduate School of Duke University

2018
Abstract

Posthumous Persona(r)e: Machado de Assis, Black Writing, and the African Diaspora

Literary Apparatus analyzes the life writings of Machado de Assis (1839-1908) in light of the conditions of his critical reception and translation in English as a basis for scholarly production and pedagogy. The concept of the posthumous and its emergence as a major theme of Machado’s literary production links the dissertation’s independent chapters in exploration of a tripartite topography; the 1) the canon of African American literature; 2) the history of African diaspora peoples; and 3) in his own life and writings.

A simple question motivates the entire project which expands in order to unpack the signifying manners of black texts: “what is writing?” The term “black writing” says no more than the word “writing” in context of a Machadian literary praxis that understands reading as a black thing. I argue, from the standpoints of phenomenology, sociolinguistics, and literary theory that the powers of black writing represent the sine qua non of basic literacy in Machado’s œuvre and the history of writing itself.

The interrelation of writing, personhood, and posthumousness in Machado’s lifework questions writing through writing, and race through race, meditating on descent and creation in exile. Posthumous Persona(r)e casts a wide theoretical net for the critical overhaul and comparative analysis of his African diasporic contemporaries,
illuminating a vast record of archival and spiritual correspondences all housed under the capacious milieu of the posthumous. Ultimate findings on the nature of writing in African diaspora reveal ways in which Machado’s writings and global renown have come to evince the resolute victory of the posthumous over worldly forces, and of what is written over what is effaced, even as his legacy has outlived successive regimes of domestic and international silencing of black individuals and communities.

In attempting to translate subtleties of the Afro-Brazilian cultural, linguistic, and historical matrix, the trajectory of which uniquely distinguish the writings and thought of Machado de Assis, I make references to classic works of criticism, anthropology, religious studies, and ethnography in order to demonstrate under-appreciated modes and traditions of writing fathomed by his literary production. In the course of reviewing notable works and critical trends in Machadian scholarship in the English language and in Portuguese, I offer an overview of significant moments of erasure that Machado’s “literary life” have resiliently endured. Tracking poetic and theoretical material in its stylistic development rom the beginnings of his publishing career, in 1854, to the advent of his national fame with the publication of The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas, in 1881, the dissertation fancies itself a posthumous memoir of his abiding youth.

The study of the conditions under which black writing in the Americas is performed functions as prolegomena to the study of African diaspora literatures in
translation from immanent theoretical groundings. Posthumous Persona(re) finds black writing in the Americas a record of African lifeways and worldviews in diaspora that express coherences of the social and spiritual life shared in common across the imagined borders of self, community, and the living. By referring to works of literature and criticism by Machado de Assis, W.E.B. Du Bois, Frederick Douglass, and James Weldon Johnson in the reading of Machado’s own lifework against the historical backdrop of their respective investments in print culture, a topography of the social network and literary apparatus of the black press comes into view as a spiritual history of quilombos.
Dedication

To all ancestors, and descendants. For M, & Ashalata.
# Contents

Abstract ......................................................................................................................................... iv  
List of Figures ................................................................................................................................ x  
1. Introduction: The Black Butterfly, or Machado’s African Americas ................................. 1  
   1.1  The Black Reader: How it Feels to be A Quest(ion)................................................ 1  
   1.2 African Afterlife ........................................................................................................... 5  
   1.3 The Black Butterfly and the Hidden Treasure: Dorantes X ...................................... 16  
2. Chapter 1: Black Writing and The History of the Book to Come ..................................... 32  
   2.1 The Alienest and the Hidden Treasure ..................................................................... 36  
   2.2 Thanks! ....................................................................................................................... 42  
   2.3 Lights, Camera, Legba: Machado Black from the Dead .......................................... 50  
3. Chapter 2: “In the Ark” with Machado: Arche-Writings of the Abyss ........................... 61  
   3.1 Re: Genesis: Archeological Revelations of the Missing Machado de Assis .......... 61  
   3.2 Myth as Secreted History: Blues People and the Black Press in Rio de Janeiro .... 83  
   3.3 Naughtobiography: Posthumous Writing of a Literary Life .................................. 93  
   3.4 The Trace of Valongo or, the Scent of ‘the Long Valley’: An Afrosonic Archeology of Arche-writing in Rio de Janeiro ................................................................. 102  
4. Chapter 3: Smoking Mirrors, or Machado’s Masques and Noms de Plume ................... 116  
   4.1 We Musketeers? Machados de Assis: Written by Themselves ............................... 121  
   4.2 (Tw)Invisible Man? The Unseen Machados de Assis.............................................. 140  
   4.3 Caesura … Rising, or Machado de Assis: About that Life....................................... 147
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>What a Difference a Day Makes</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Spell on America: Confessions of a Black Reader and the Woman M/Ark</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Quilom-byss: The Abyss of Quilombo and New International Ogun</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>Harquebus Suite: “Quilomboje” or, the Black Press Now</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Maritime News: Machado about Nothing</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>MachaDOOM: Meta(l) Faced Moleque</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>(x)Angola Lucida: Reading of the Future in the Colors of Utopia</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>A Good Example</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>Mo’ Mysteries</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>Black Skin, Meta(l) Masque: “Under God In[di]visible”</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>(br)Othership Connection: Haitian Manifestations of New International Ogun</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Book of Love: Epilogue for Mexico</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Works Cited</td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Biography</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Figures

Figure 1: Horrifying Fact: Illustration by Heinrich Fleiuss, text by Machado de Assis... 44

Figure 2: “My father bleeds history” Table of Contents page from Maus by Art
Spiegelman (Spiegelman) ....................................................................................................... 116

Figure 3: Machados Unmasked............................................................................................... 121

Figure 4: Bahia Illustrada no 33, cover page (1 of 8) ............................................................ 123

Figure 5: COLLINGS OVERLAND TELEGRAPH, (1866) .................................................. 124

Figure 6: Chiaro(b)scuro .......................................................................................................... 126

Figure 7: Secret 77 ..................................................................................................................... 127

Figure 8: The eclipse on August 29, 1867 at 9:38 am ............................................................ 130

Figure 9: ”...take count yourself. Are there any missing?” Semana Illustrada, no 662 ...... 133

Figure 10: At the National Expo............................................................................................. 139

Figure 11: APPEARANCE OF A NEW STAR, Semana Illustrada, no 713. ....................... 144

Figure 12: EX FUMO DARE LUCEM: From smoke let light break forth......................... 146

Figure 13: CESAR RISING....................................................................................................... 147

Figure 14: ”What a difference!” ............................................................................................. 149

Figure 15: Meta(l) Masque: Machado’s ‘Martelladas’ .......................................................... 197

Figure 16: Coincidences: “PHOTOGRAPHO -Assim...quando eu abrir isto, você olhe para dentro do vidro. – Agora...um, dois, três, quatro...” ................................................... 206

Figure 17 O Moleque of the Illustrated Week decides to “take the liberty of dressing up
like God-Momo” – since “no one else would take the part” ............................................. 216
Figure 18: “A GOOD SLAVE SPOILED: These are the consequences of teaching the black boys to read and write; they become keepers and confidents of all of our secrets!” ......222

Figure 19 - “PROPOSALS. “LEASING OF BRAZILIAN RAILWAYS: ............................ 235

Figure 20: Machado de Assis, Rio de Janeiro, circa 1890....................................................239
Acknowledgements

All praises are due to the Creator for making the posthumous possible for all things – not only for people, but all beings assisted in the production of this thesis. The opportunity to learn from and to acknowledge ancestors and descendants requires recognition on my part that the forces that go into any movement or meaning are composed of an uncountable ecology of beings in the immemorial expanse of the universe. In other words, beyond those who may be known and named, the lives and living of each contributor to this project are deeply cherished – and words cannot do justice to gratitude.

I’m grateful as well to Justin Read for first introducing me to Machado de Assis and teaching poetry, language, and literature in a way that opened new possibilities to my life; to Keith Griffler, whose courses of African Diaspora liberation movements and constant encouragement of my nascent scholarship endowed me with new heroes and goals; to Hershini Bhana Young for showing how to read and teach, access and respect the power of literature to transform and quicken myth and history; to Carine Mardorossian for inspiration and critical support of my intellectual journey and exploration into a the skein of spirits and ancestors, texts and authors have enduringly shaped my awareness of diasporas. I am honored to have had the privileged to write for
this committee including Justin Read, Fred Moten, Priscilla Wald, Joseph Donahue, and Nathaniel Mackey, and I thank them for serving in this dynamic capacity.

And in thanking my earthly mother(s) and father(s), brothers and sisters, I thank the spirits of the ancestors, all of the orishas and minkisi, the Elegbara Exu, the Ogums, and Oxums, Oxossis, Xangos, Oyas, Yemanjas, the Cabocos, Oxalás and Lebarenganga, Nkassute, Nkossi, Ndandalunda, Nzazi, Mutakalambo, Sambalaoa, Mavambo, Simbi Makaya, Matamba and Kavungo, Damballah, Oxumare, Orunmila; Keith Clarke, Cynthia Norris-Dorren, Martin Dorren, Mãe Caçulinha de Oxum, Tata Katuwanjesi, ILABANTU, Flávio Pontes, Elza Gabaldi, Liliane Braga, Cliff Welch, Patricia Cerqueira, Haydée Paixão, Rodrigo Bueno, Gaspar Z’Africa Brasil, and Tiganá Santana. Maryscot Mullins, Kathy Psomiades, and Robert Mitchell; Patrick Alexander, Reginald Patterson, Solomon Burnette, Allison Curseen, Ashon Crawley, Kátia Luciana Alves, Tatá Ygbinangy, and Ken Taylor. Conversations and classes with Sadakne Baroudi, Navid Naderi, Tina Campt, Jason “Oak” Richie, Ainehi Edoro, Sean Ward, Mitali Routh, Pete Moore, Rodrigo Bueno, Joseph Donahue, Priscilla Wald, Ndembwemi, Maria Hamilton Abegunde, M. NourbeSe Philip, Nathaniel Mackey, Saidiya Hartman, Diamuganga, V.-Y. Mudimbe, Priscilla Pinto Ferreira, Achille Mbembe, Tsitsi Jaji, Zahyia Rolle, Jean Casimir, Jay Wright, Hortense Spillers, and Fred Moten have been invaluable to me and my work; I salute them, and the future reader, upon whom the fates of all text depend.
1. Introduction: The Black Butterfly, or Machado’s African Americas

a work that is not there, then, but present in the single coinciding with what is always beyond.

– Maurice Blanchot, The Book to Come

Let us descend, once again, into the shadowy realm of myth, to ascertain the black tradition’s fundamental idea of itself, buried or encoded in its primal myths—ambiguous, enigmatic, profoundly figurative, complex rhetorical structures—which seem to have been scattered through several concealed fragments, as if to protect its own code from (mis)appropriation.

– Henry Louis Gates, Jr., The Signifying Monkey

1.1 The Black Reader: How itFeels to be A Quest(ion)

THE MOST MAGNIFICENT DRAMA IN THE LAST THOUSAND YEARS OF HUMAN HISTORY is the transportation of ten million human beings out of the dark beauty of their mother continent into the new-found El Dorado of the West. They descended into Hell; and in the third century they arose from the dead, in the finest effort to achieve democracy for the working millions which this world had ever seen. It was a tragedy that beggared
When, in *The Souls of Black Folk*, Dubois asks the reader if they know “how it feels,” his address, breaking the fourth wall of the essayist’s form with direct appeal to reader as other, conscience, and moral agent, extends invitation and solicitation to the reader to pause, reflect, and come back to the text and context; its aims and direct inquiry: do you know how it feels?\(^1\) It was not purely a rhetorical question even if the reader does not seek to furnish a reply or adopt reflection on the lack of that knowledge of feeling. An induction to feeling, produced by a phrase, a gesture toward thinking in a register of ontological rupture: “to be a problem” (Du Bois and Edwards). It was an invitation to a thought experiment in double consciousness, literally an *ek-stasis* or ‘standing outside’ the habitus...
of privilege or poverty. Du Bois’s question fields existential and sociological responses from its readers privately, anonymously fathoming the multiple different responses and levels of engagement with his anthropological address to the American reader or the reader of (his) America. We do and do not know – we can, and cannot, imagine.

Feeling as knowledge, an epistemology of phenomenology, is beyond the conceptual scope of this dissertation to explore as a theme, yet it is at the heart of the matter of black lifeways and writings herein considered and explored. The question is not “what was African American literature,” nor what it is, or will be, or by what other names a rose should be called. If, after Maurice Blanchot, we may “suppose that literature begins when literature becomes a question” (Blanchot The Work of Fire 300), the question, in this case, is: who? Who is the black writer? Who is the black reader? Do we

---

² This red herring is the title of a critical monograph and numerous book reviews; see: (Warren).
³ Somebody looking over my shoulder (perhaps me) says, reading the question: Who comes after the subject?: "You return here to that far away time when you were taking your baccalaureate exam." — "Yes, but this time I will fail."— "Then, if I understand you correctly, the 'who comes' never comes, except arbitrarily, or has always already come, in accordance with some incongruous words that I remember having read somewhere, not without irritation, where it is referred to the coming of what does not come, of what would come without an arrival, outside of Being and adrift." — "The term 'adrift' is, in fact, appropriate here, but my halting remarks are not entirely useless, and they bring us back to an insecurity that no formulation could avoid" (Blanchot "Who?").
know what it feels like to give consideration to these questions? Does the reader have a problem with the question? How does it feel to be a black reader?

The matter is not what African American literature is or was, but who: who is reading it, and who those writings are. “Excavate those corpses,” as Viola Davis has said, “tell those stories.” Excavate those languages and literatures, those enduring transhistorical bodies speaking in (all) tongues, and you will have remembered the Diaspora! Such a lens and methodology of the auscultation of black life is of urgency and relevance to the international and translational study of African diaspora writing and literacies and the historical and literary phenomenon of the Machadiana - the life writings and posthumous publications, and the secondary literature of notable biography and criticism – of Brazilian, Afro-descendant, poet, critic, dramatist, historian, philosopher, encomiast of lunacy, Machado de Assis.

To the Reader:
For some time, I debated over whether I should start these memoirs at the beginning or at the end, that is, whether I should put my birth or my death in first place. Since common usage would call for beginning with birth, two considerations
led me to adopt a different method: the first is that I am not exactly a writer who is dead but a dead man who is a writer, for whom the grave was a second cradle; the second is that the writing would be more distinctive and novel in that way. Moses, who also wrote about his death, didn’t place it at the opening but at the close: a radical difference between this book and the Pentateuch.

- Machado de Assis, *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas*

### 1.2 African Afterlife

The contemporary problem facing all artworks is how to begin and how to close…

- Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*

The passage of the substance of consciousness and memory into the afterlife, upon which the narrative and drama of the novel depends, announced from the beginning by the deceased himself, in the first paragraph of *The Posthumous Memoirs,* makes the extraordinary gesture of a personal introduction by rehearsing his last breath:

Standing by the head of the bed, her eyes cloudy, her mouth half open, the sad lady had a hard time believing my extinction. “Dead! Dead!” she kept saying to herself. And her imagination, like the storks that an illustrious traveler watched taking flight from the Ilissus on their way to African shores without the hindrance of ruins and times—that lady’s imagination also flew over the present rubble to the shores of a youthful Africa … Let it go. We’ll get there later on. We’ll go there when I get my early years back. Now I want to die peacefully, methodically, listening to the ladies sobbing, the men talking softly, the rain drumming on the caladium leaves of my suburban home, and the strident sound of a knife a grinder
is sharpening outside by a harness-maker’s door. I swear to you that the orchestra of death was not at all as sad as it might have seemed. From a certain point on it even got to be delightful. Life was thrashing about in my chest with the surging of an ocean wave. My consciousness was evaporating. I was descending into physical and moral immobility and my body was turning into a plant, a stone, mud, nothing at all (Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas).

The unconventional coupling of adjective and noun in the title “Posthumous Memoirs” creates a kind of paradoxical exchange or dissonance between the past and future of experience posited by the notion of death both as limit and end of life, and of memory as a sign and experience of the living. One is reminded of the tryst of syntax in Machado’s thesis which is also a short story and its experimental product, “The Metaphysics of Style, or In the Priest’s Head” (Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis Stories).

The premise of The Posthumous Memoirs thus posits a life after death, a psychic or spiritual location of the consciousness of the narrator – a conceptual narrative environment instantaneously erected, a deus ex machina of prolegomena from which the narrative proceeds to historicize from across the horizon of death and in its initial rehearsal. The multiple horizons of reflective memory and self-conscious afterlife conjoin in this inter(African)-invention and archipelagic collage of associations, references, and tableaus. Whence the birds and rivers, Africa and African shores?

The hereafter used as a platform of Brás Cubas’ personal memory, rather than an opportunity for the delivery of messages from the unseen for the instruction and guidance of mortals or news of worlds beyond, at once comically taunts the imagination.
and sarcastically dashes the same expectations raised by the narrator, promising and 
depriving the reader by turns of an enduring idea of or momentary encounter with the 
other-worldly. The scene of the ascended narrator, defunct and decomposed, he seems 
to claim, for his address and audience are the same as a substance of world history: this 
is it: as if to say, all there is: the posthumous, the otherworldly, the African / fantastic is: 
all right here.

Etymologically, Brás Cubas’ argument is air tight – he is hermetically and 
semantically sealed in posthumousness. The ‘posthumous,’ literally meaning that which 
has been buried, interred, laid low, beneath or pertaining to the period after cover of 
earth in qualifying the conditions of the memoirs’ production present the language body 
of Brás Cubas and both a disembodied substance and, true to his word, a kind of psychic 
and corporeal compost tilled by the action of the eyes on the page, eaten again, after the 
worm, in the reader’s hands. The understated joke and hidden pun, right under the 
surface, is a connotation that would not have been lost on the polyglot, polymath wizard 
of words; enjoying or not the reading and consumption of the decomposed authorial 
material, the reader becomes a bookworm, chewing through the ashes as inside a 
Grecian urn.
The literary narrative form as organic effluvia of the psychic, textual apparatus, as raw ecological matter, present the immanence of “a life” as the *prima materia* the reader proceeds to peruse and fondle in the consumption and digestion, critique and judgement of the author’s credibility and reliability, charisma and sanity; all as if weighing the quality of the narrator’s soul his retelling of his deeds, all unfolding en toto by the reader’s turning of the pages of the living testament, the liminal document of his personal last judgement: “And that was how I reached the closure of my days. That was how I set out for Hamlet’s undiscovered country without the anxieties or doubts of the young prince, but, rather, slow and lumbering, like someone leaving the spectacle late. Late and bored” (Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas*). With an almost obnoxiously flexible agenda, Brás Cubas makes quite a head-turning formulation, still in this first chapter of his memoir – remarking Shakespeare’s

---

Hamlet as the site of a formulation of death or the afterlife as “the undiscovered country.” What an apparatus! The revenant of Machado’s satirical novel speaks of his prior life from the hereafter through digression and detour, a kind of naval-gazing replay of a meandering existence of ultimately little spiritual weight or historical import. The spiritual biography without events, only illusions, gestures, delirium leans with this irony of a ghost who lingers on only to yawn.6

Yet unlike the prince of Denmark in descent and ambition, and unlike the ghost of Hamlet’s father in consequence and bravado, whose appearance to “the young prince” bursts with alarm and gravitas, Brás Cubas seems to have not only no particular vendetta, agenda, or investments in history. The relations in the social world which the soul’s living form had departed, leave him with indifference and, from his mortal lateness, it seems he could not have died soon enough. There seems to be method to his madness – but whose method, and to whose madness? By his own telling, it was an irony afflictive of the everyman, that eternal recurrence of Murphy’s Law, that the

6 “this book is written with apathy, with the apathy of a man now freed of the brevity of the century, a supinely philosophical work, of an unequal philosophy, now austere, now playful, something that neither builds nor destroys, neither inflames nor cools, and, yet, it is more than a pastime and less than an apostolate.”
panacea he devoted his life to discovering eventually killed him: “I died of pneumonia,” he explains, “yet if I tell my reader that it wasn’t so much the pneumonia that caused my death but a magnificent and useful idea he might not believe me and, nevertheless, it’s the truth. Let me explain briefly. You can judge for yourself.” By his own reckoning, to which the entirety of the second chapter entitled “The Poultice” is dedicated, it was his quest for the holy grail of a panacea, that fatal case of an idée fixe, that proved his circuitous undoing:

As it so happened, one day in the morning while I was strolling about my place an idea started to hang from the trapeze I have in my brain. Once hanging there, it began to wave its arms and legs and execute the most daring antics of a tightrope-walker that anyone could imagine. I let myself stand there contemplating it. Suddenly it took a great leap, extended its arms and legs until it took on the shape of an X: decipher me or I’ll devour you. That idea was nothing less than the invention of a sublime remedy, an anti-hypochondriacal poultice, destined to alleviate our melancholy humanity. In the patent application that I drew up afterward I brought that truly Christian product to the government’s attention. I didn’t hide from friends, however, the pecuniary rewards that would of needs result from the distribution of a product with such far-reaching and profound effects. But now that I’m on the other side of life I can confess everything: what mainly influenced me was the pleasure I would have seeing in print in newspapers, on store counters, in pamphlets, on street corners, and, finally, on boxes of the medicine these three words: Brás Cubas Poultice. Why deny it? I had a passion for ballyhoo, the limelight, fireworks. More modest people will censure me perhaps for this defect. I’m confident, however, that clever people will recognize this talent of mine. So, my idea had two faces, like a medal, one turned toward the public and the other toward me. On one side philanthropy and profit, on the other a thirst for fame. Let us say: —love of glory. An uncle of mine, a canon with full pretend, liked to say that love of temporal glory was the perdition of souls, who should covet only eternal glory. To which another uncle, an officer in one of those old infantry regiments called terços, would retort that love of glory was the most truly human thing there was in a man and, consequently, his most
genuine attribute. Let the reader decide between the military man and the canon. I’m going back to the poultice (Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas 9).

Through the third and fourth chapters, the *idée fixe* of the poultice and his distracted labors towards its realization are recounted, with illustrations from history that seem to require readers to have access to Wikipedia or Google to keep up with his multiple references’ jumbled litany:

My idea, after so many leaps and bounds, had become an *idée fixe*. God save you, dear reader, from an *idée fixe*, better a speck, a mote in the eye. Look at Cavour: It was the *idée fixe* of Italian unity that killed him. It’s true that Bismarck didn’t die, but we should be warned that nature is terribly fickle and history eternally meretricious. For example, Suetonius gave us a Claudius who was a simpleton—or “a pumpkinhead” as Seneca called him—and a Titus who deserved being the delight of all Rome. In modern times a professor came along and found a way of demonstrating that of the two Caesars the delight, the real delight, was Seneca’s “pumpkinhead.” …I’ll take my position between the poet and the savant. So, long live history, voluble history, which is good at anything, and, getting back to the *idée fixe*, let me say that it’s what produces strong men and madmen. A mobile idea, vague or changeable, is what produces a Claudius—according to the formula of Suetonius. My idea was fixed, fixed like … I can’t think of anything fixed enough in this world: maybe the moon, maybe the pyramids of Egypt, maybe the dead German Diet. … For my part, if I can ever remember Cromwell it’s only because of the idea that His Highness, with the same hand that locked up Parliament might have imposed the Brás Cubas poultice on the English. Don’t laugh at that joint victory of pharmaceutics and puritanism. Who isn’t aware that beneath every great, public, showy flag quite often there are several other modestly private banners that are unfurled and waving in the shadow of the first, and ever so many times outlive it? To make a poor comparison, it’s like the rabble huddled in the shadow of a feudal castle, and when the latter fell, the riffraff remained (Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas 11).
As if to waste no time in the serial production of a kind of literary machine of the moving image, the fifth chapter, whose title is itself a reference to this unidentified cinematographic experiment, the title of the following “Chapter V,” doubles as a bizarre preview and spoiler alert, “In Which a Lady’s Ear Appears.”

We learn that the part alone is visible due to the narrator’s point of view within the memory’s recitation; the narration of unedited frame of recollection ends abruptly in its retelling. The break is cinematographic as the reader, conceding to animate the anecdotal scene, gives light and motion to the frame. Brás Cubas stops narrating this anecdote in such a way that the forward motion of the figure of the woman into the threshold of the doorway is inexpertly edited in recollection, paused only partially in frame to the specifications of a replay reel in a sports broadcast, produces in consciousness without a projector what in film studies is called cinematic enunciation, drawing meta-critical attention to the means of production as the latter itself speaks.

The cinematographic delirium and narrative languaging mechanism of all these detours and technologies employed to show how he died animate and condense the phantasmagoria of the mise en scène of a particular reading, gesture toward the route the idée fixe has taken through a circuitous explanation, proving as an idea to be anything but fixed. The African imagination and homeland is also repeated in this reference again to his death and the poultice, the panacea, and the presence of ruins:
When I was busy preparing and refining my invention, however, I was caught in a strong draft. I fell ill right after and I didn’t take care of myself. I had the poultice on my brain. I was carrying with me the idée fixe of the mad and the strong. I could see myself from a distance rising up from the mob-ridden earth and ascending to heaven like an immortal eagle, and before such a grand spectacle no man can feel the pain that’s jabbing at him. The next day I was worse. I finally did something about it, but in an incomplete way, with no method or attention or follow-through. Such was the origin of the illness that brought me to eternity.

…Let it be imagined that, instead of laying down the bases for a pharmaceutical invention, I was trying to bring together the elements of a political institution or a religious reformation. The current of air came and efficiently conquered human calculations and there went everything. That’s the way man’s fate goes. With that reflection I took leave of the woman, I won’t say the most discreet, but certainly the most beautiful among her contemporaries, the one whose imagination, like the storks on the Ilissus … [Machado’s ellipsis] She was fifty-four then, she was a ruin, a splendid ruin. Let the reader imagine that we had been in love, she and I, many years before and that, one day, when I was already ill, I see her appear in the door of my bedroom (Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas).

Love, knowledge, creation and the invention of eternity gather here, but what is most interesting to me about the strange passing of Brás Cubas is the spiritual and environmental imagery which mark the transition, the planetary and psychic geography of this passage between forms of life and recollection.

The historical, literary, and allegorical contexts which foreground Africa place its appearance center stage in the conceptual registers of origin and destination, enveloping cradle and grave, not only as primordial origin, but as cosmogonic future: Africa as Afterlife: “Let it go. We’ll get there later on. We’ll go there when I get my early years back. Now I want to die peacefully, methodically, listening…” It remains open for
interpretation what the significance, if any, should be given to the double mention of
African shores, or for that matter what getting his “early years back” might mean, or
what exactly is enacted in the reminiscence of a ghost reliving his quondam death.

Africa as Afterlife in the formulation of Brás Cubas, and his repatriation “to
Hamlet’s undiscovered country” (Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis The Posthumous
Memoirs of Brás Cubas) make another literary reference immediately available to our
consideration, without crossing the Atlantic so much as angling up the eastern seaboard,
to the mise en scène of Frederick Douglass’ Narrative, where, contemplating and
anticipating by turns with dread and resolve the occasion of his escape to freedom, he
finds himself existentially Hamletian:

But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscovered country, from whose bourn
No traveler returns, puzzles the will,
and makes us rather bear those ills we have,
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus, conscience does make cowards of us all,
and thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o’er, with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pitch and moment,
with this regard their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action (Shakespeare).

Between a rock and a hard place, Douglass quotes Hamlet repeatedly across
multiple performances of his own life narrative in attempt to illustrate the pitch of
tensions facing himself and his comrades as would-be fugitive slaves. The author takes
up the reference in relation to the same dramatic hinge in the plot of his first Narrative, as well as in My Bondage, My Freedom:

The case, sometimes, to our excited visions, stood thus: At every gate through which we had to pass, we saw a watchman; at every ferry, a guard; on every bridge, a sentinel; and in every wood, a patrol or slave-hunter. We were hemmed in on every side. The good to be sought, and the evil to be shunned, were flung in the balance, and weighed against each other. On the one hand, there stood slavery; a stern reality, glaring frightfully upon us, with the blood of millions in his polluted skirts--terrible to behold--greedily devouring our hard earnings and feeding himself upon our flesh. Here was the evil from which to escape. On the other hand, far away, back in the hazy distance, where all forms seemed but shadows, under the flickering light of the north star--behind some craggy hill or snow-covered mountain--stood a doubtful freedom, half frozen, beckoning us to her icy domain. This was the good to be sought. The inequality was as great as that between certainty and uncertainty. This, in itself, was enough to stagger us; but when we came to survey the untrodden road, and conjecture the many possible difficulties, we were appalled, and at times, as I have said, were upon the point of giving over the struggle altogether (Douglass).

The slave narrative is a genre in which the speaker or the writer is ostensibly the subject of a transfiguration in the course of their own narrative; transformed from the state of absolute social liminality and the incredible condition of unauthorized source of personal testimony figured for the African under the dehumanizing regimes and subhuman legal statuses of the enslaved or free Negro person. The production and distribution through writing and print of the ex-slave as authoritative personage and publicly certified narrator within ante-bellum American society opened the way through passages heavily bracketed by mediation and censorship and notarized by paternalistic and condescending authenticating letters, nevertheless revealed the potentially
omniscient actor of the black writer as protagonist and author, written by themselves, constructing a discursively coherent social being in the affirmation of personhood that was also a negation of the negation of black life.

The “slave narratives’ formulation of a self-reflective subjectivity … compels us to read them as the inception of a negative history. This is a history of illegibility…” (Judy 98). In narrative freedom to relay and frame, invent or guarantee the related events of their own stories, writers in such a position as Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, the Crafts, Equiano, Malcolm X, and other (n)autobiographers, have activated through the charisma of their tellings of transformation, as from the other side of that experience of negation, gifts experienced there upon the shores of self-knowledge, prisons of freedom, scrawl spaces of liberty, holds of emancipatation, and silences liberation materialized as evidences of survival and tokens of wisdom in writing. The written word as not just evidence of humanity, but the presence of the body and the substance of “a life.”

What you are looking for is what is looking.
- St. Francis of Assisi

1.3 The Black Butterfly and the Hidden Treasure: Dorantes X

…I think if you burn the facts long and hard enough in yourself as crucible you’ll come to the few facts that matter. And
then fact can be fable again. It is fact as fable that I am after in this new book. I propose to open with Cabeza de Vaca, to get the first swift land weave of white, red and, via his companion Estevanico, the black. From there out I plan to tell about a dozen “facts” as simply and directly and as “scholarly” accurately (this is paramount) as possible, all to bear historically on the first or essential meetings of white, red and black with the land America, all at the same time, if they are correctly chosen, to read the keys to us as we are today.

- Charles Olson, 1946

Bismillah becomes a circle.

- Craig Thompson, *Habib*

Legends ascribed to “the Moor’s” invention the tale of his fatal and fugitive yarn, whether retold as fiction or narrated as myth or history, the facts, ’passing strange’ though they be, are not just the stuff of legend, as the records of black writing in the Americas attest. The opening lines of Lalami’s speculative memoir, *The Moor’s Account*,
imply the delivery of language native to the speaker in translation – that is, the author captures the sense of an accent, and the work of translation in a telling, grounding through narrative style a cross-cultural address in form and custom:

In the name of God, most compassionate, most merciful. Praise be to God, the Lord of the worlds, and prayers and blessings be on our prophet Muhammad and upon all his progeny and companions. This book is the humble work of Mustafa ibn Muhammad ibn Abdussalam al-Zamori, being a true account of his life and travels from the city of Azemmur to the Land of the Indians, where he arrived as a slave and, in his attempt to return to freedom, was shipwrecked and lost for many years. Because I have written this narrative long after the events I recount took place, I have had to rely entirely on my memory (Lalami).

The first phrase a citation, spells out the attitude and orientation adopted by the speaker, grounding the novel in the characterization of a first-person narrator, dedicated from the outset, to God.

This address, and invocation, in the introduction of a speaker, in turn productive of the narrator, functions to establish the authenticity and credibility of the Moorishness of the Moroccan traveler, healer, conquistador, and fabulist of Lalami’s characterization. Transliterated from the Arabic, Bismillah Irrahman Iraheem, are the first words of the first sura of the Qur’an, the pronunciation of which can be heard in the preface to the albums of Mos Def aka Yasiin Bey, and intoned during daily obligatory prayer in Muslim life.

This benediction and organizing, non-thetic principle of Muslim daily life and action is also an example of a loan word to shamanic practices adjacent or overlapping to Arab and Islamic culture in the act of healing and the hypothesis of prayer; their
performative and inaugural value to Muslim discourse and daily life cannot be overstated nor restricted to formal adherence. I want to focus on the way in which the shamanic practices of healers in the Americas, and across Africa, in Europe and Asia (for instance, see (Sultanova) have involved literature and language, particularly the holy scriptures and sacred words. The manner in which these medicines have been tucked into the lining of stories and anecdotes, customs and traditions descendant of Africans in diaspora tells of the aesthetics, purpose and endurance of their handiwork in imaginations and archives.

Mustafa, Muhammad, Rahman, Raheem, names and attributes of God; these logocentric genitives organize centuries of Muslim life in Africa and Europe, Asia and the Americas, around the expression of the names and attributes of Allah, the one Creator, through the actions and words, example and person of the Prophet Muhammad. Hence the equal importance to such a conceptual, performative, and knowledge-based requirement, setting in motion duties and guiding the formation of values and behavior by relating anecdotal and instructional materials through reliable sources and trustworthy vehicles of the memorized and recited Hadith and its transcription, translation and dissemination in the written word.

Spanish law would have prevented the transportation of Muslims to the New World, so officially, his conversion to Christianity was not only formally necessitated by
his inclusion on the ship’s manifest, it was discursively obligatory and, thus, taken for
granted by his companions. Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua, who marked the twain of the
brutal conventions of a slavery economy some three hundred years later, under much
more gruesome routines of African dehumanization before him, converted to
Christianity under different circumstances and travelled as a missionary to Haiti,
perhaps for similar reason. Whether Mustafa ibn Muhammad ibn Abdussalam al-
Zamouri had converted inwardly, socially, and culturally, or merely outwardly in the
trappings and liberations of habit and the passing of display to the Roman Catholicism
of his hapless masters is difficult to say but tempting to guess.

Interpretations of this multi-faceted persona vary widely in his treatment by
historiographers. In *The Shaping of Black America*, Lerone Bennett strikes a cautionary
pose in relation to the spoils and excesses in this entry on black writing in the New
World, painting Black Stephen as a kind of new Icarus, outshining even the Spanish in
ambition and folly: “it seems that Dorantes, a fearless and, some say, an arrogant man,
overplayed his hand” (Bennett 84). But, who knows? Bennett draws conclusions upon
the palimpsest of speculations gone before, revealing as the next interpretation will,
much of the nature of our own seeing, in such instances, and our language used in
revealing and producing such perceptions.
Henry Louis Gates, Jr. writes a slightly different biographical entry for the name “Dorantes,” “the only one of several Africans in the expedition of about five hundred persons,” who survived shipwreck off the coast of Florida in 1528 (Gates *The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross*).\(^8\) This moniker works for his purposes because he makes no reference to “Stephen’s” ‘master’ whom he helped survive the shipwreck and escape slavery, with whom he, naturally, shares the same last name. But because it doesn’t work for our purposes to normalize the use of the “slave name” when others are available or where inventing another will do, it’s useful at least to take note of who is being called what as their actions and views, morals and miracles are being discussed by historical authorities. “Dorantes,” Gates notes, distinguished himself as a medicine man and interpreter and was “in constant” conversation with the Indians. “It was the Negro,” Cabeza de Vaca, the Spanish leader, said, “who talked to them [the Indians] all the time; he inquired about the road we should follow, the villages – in short, about everything we wished to know. After some two years of wandering, in reaching the Spanish settlement in Mexico…, never at a loss for the right word or the right approach, Dorantes soon became a hero in the settlement with stories of his exploits – doubtlessly embellished – in Indian territory. The Spanish were especially taken with

---

\(^8\) Shortly after the landing near Pensacola Bay in May, most of these persons were killed by the Indians or died of disease and hunger. Some, if we can credit the narratives, were killed by their hungry and terrified colleagues, who ate them. The survivors – a mere handful – hurriedly reembarked in September and set out for Mexico. But most of them, including Navarez, were drowned in a violent storm off the coast of Texas. The four survivors – three white men and the indestructible Stephen Dorantes – were captured and held in servitude by the Indians of western Louisiana or eastern Texas.”
Dorantes’ stories of Cibola or “the seven Cities of Gold.” And so, in 1539, the
governor dispatched an expedition to Cibola. The leader of this expedition was
Father Marcos de Niza, and the guide and ambassador to the Indians was Stephen
Dorantes.

Robert Goodwin, recommended and cited by Gates, in his Crossing the Continent,
takes a much richer and layered, and extremely rigorous historical account of the
traveler whom he has far fewer reservations about and much ampler proofs of his
wondrous feats, but still no birthname. His solution is reasonable, adapting from the
Spanish official Estebanico, an anglicized ‘Esteban’ for his avatar of the Seven Cities
mythos and history.

There are three main sources for Esteban’s biography, all written by Europeans
who were his companions during his adventures. The General and Natural History
of the Indies, by Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés, Spanish Historian Royal,
which contains an account of Pánfilo Narváez’s expedition to conquer and settle
Florida of 1527 to 1536. Shipwrecks, an account of that expedition attributed to
Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, who survived alongside Esteban. Marcos de Niza’s
Report on the expedition to the Seven Cities of Cibola, modern Zuni in New
Mexico, during which Esteban disappeared (Goodwin).

He notes that:

Esteban became the pivotal character in the amazing adventures he and his
Spanish companions lived through during the first crossing of North America in
recorded history. The story is well documented because an official report based on
the testimony of three Spanish survivors—Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, Andrés
Dorantes de Carranza, and Alonso del Castillo Maldonado—was compiled in
1536. How foreign and unfamiliar these names seem to us today, even though the
first crossing of lands that later became the United States of America is so well
documented. Nothing, perhaps, could be more indicative of the biases in our
traditional understanding of when and where American history began. Long
before the Pilgrim fathers established their colony, long before any significant
European settlement on the east coast, Esteban had become one of the greatest
explorers in the history of North America. In due course, he led a Spanish expedition deep into modern Arizona and New Mexico, and he may have died within the frontiers of the modern United States. Esteban was the first great explorer in America; he was also, perhaps, the first African-American (Goodwin, 7). …In 1902, a distinguished African-American veteran of the Spanish-American War, Major Richard Robert Wright, concluded an academic paper by asking why Esteban had “remained practically in obscurity for more than three and a half centuries.” “The answer is not difficult,” he replied, for “until recently historians were not careful to note with any degree of accuracy and with due credit the useful and noble deeds of the Negro companions of the Spanish conquerors, because Negroes were slaves, the property of masters who were supposed to be entitled to the credit for whatever the latter accomplished….If someone more competent will undertake a thorough investigation of the subject the purpose of the writer will have been accomplished…” (8).

The history of Azemmour at the time Esteban was there, sometime between 1500 and 1520, is inseparable from the origins of the Atlantic slave trade. The people of the Mediterranean, Muslim and Christian, European and North African, were fascinated by the almost mythical world … beyond … the Sahara…. They were especially interested in “black gold,” sub-Saharan Africans from the Land of the Blacks who had been sold into slavery and brought for sale in the Mediterranean markets (Goodwin 91). Esteban, Castillo, Cabeza de Vaca, and Dorantes spent five years living among the coastal Karankawa. What did they do? What did they think? Why did they decide to move on after five years and not before? When they did move on, they did not go to the Spanish settlement at Pánuco. Why not? Why on earth did they travel in the opposite direction? Why, instead, did they end up in Sonora in northwest Mexico? Oviedo and Shipwrecks offer a bewildering range of differing and often conflicting answers to these questions. What is more, not only do Oviedo and Shipwrecks tell different stories, but neither account is especially clear in itself. Time goes astray. Whole years are missing. The anecdotal detail of individual incidents intrudes on broad generalizations, but with little sense of purpose. Important events are described differently and in a different order, so that they float like castaways on a narrative sea, washed hither and thither without much continuity of context. The most important of these floating elements in the story is the claim made in both accounts that somehow the survivors mysteriously became medicine men, shamans with almost magical, God- granted power over the Indians of the interior. But Oviedo and Shipwrecks do not concur as to how, when, or why this came about. (Goodwin, 235).
In any account, Islam and Christianity, Spain and Morocco, Europe and Africa reach the shores of the New World at once in the person of this traveler, who leads them to the Seven Cities of Gold, in master class on the mystical literatures, healing powers, and schools of thought surrounding both Christianity and Islam, found in Franciscan and Sufi traditions, where poverty and wealth, life and death, immortality and transience are the essential consequences and phenomena at issue. As Robert Goodwin writes on the imaginaire of the Moor’s party:

It is worth remembering that when Cortés first set foot in the Aztec capital Mexico-Tenochtitlán, he told the Emperor Montezuma that the Spaniards suffered from a disease of the heart that might be cured only with gold. That belief in a civilization in the north was encouraged by the medieval Spanish legend of the “Seven Portuguese Bishops,” who had fled from the advancing Moors during the bleakest period in the history of Christian Spain. During that Dark Age, the bishops took to their boats and sailed out into the Atlantic Ocean, until they eventually reached a great island, where they settled and founded seven Christian cities.

This old legend was given a new lease of life in 1448, when sailors from a Portuguese ship claimed that a ferocious storm had driven them onto the shores of that legendary island. They said that they had been carried on the shoulders of the population to a church, where a Mass was said. Then, when the storm relented, they set sail and went home to Portugal, where they were severely scolded for failing to record the precise position of that miraculous Christian island. North America was quickly identified in the collective imagination of Spanish Mexico as the island where the “Portuguese bishops” had established their colonies. (Goodwin, 296).

Whether he converted or not, or derived literary and philosophical enjoyment from the proposed quest whose party he headed is irrelevant to the probability that the shamanic and faith healing practices in which Dorantes X notably engaged to legendary
effect, accumulating the spoils of an autobiography fit for a new world Othello, might have gone through this afrosonic route and ancient tradition of recitation and utterance, chanting and intonation of the names of God – silently or aloud – of praying, singing, remembering in an African tongue.

Because he went first, ahead of the party, Esteban now controlled the Indians’ understanding and image of the survivors. He was the first to meet the Indians, to talk with them, to tell them who he was and who the white men were. …They were amazed by the single mysterious figure at the forefront who was burned jet black by the southern sun. It was stranger still that the dark-skinned harbinger of hope should be accompanied by rude, ruddy, golden-skinned white men with flowing blond beards. But Esteban controlled that potentially powerful language of pigment and identity with precise dexterity and the Indians soon came to worship all the survivors as “Children of the Sun.” (Goodwin, 254).

The variety of recommended conclusions are thus telling – the whole story, but not the whole tale – on one hand each reading of the story is a fruitful exercise of its inexhaustible retelling and on the other hand the singularity of what happened is eternal, a truth that remains outside narrative’s capacities. “Without waiting for Father Marcos and the main party,” Bennett writes, almost chiding – as if the slave’s normative role of compliance was in this instance remarkable:

he strode into the pueblo and demanded the traditional tribute of ‘turquoises and women.’ The Indians, fearing his power and the power of the men he represented, imprisoned him. The next day, ‘when the sunne was a lance high,’ Dorantes tried to escape and died in a hurricane of arrows. This marked the ending of the expedition and the beginning of the Dorantes legend. To this day, Zuñi legends preserve the story of the “Black Mexican, a large man,” who came from his abode “in Everlasting Sumerland.”
And it should be said, at least in passing, that Dorantes’ role was shot through with ambiguity (Bennett 84-7). Is the pun intentional in Bennett’s version of “Stephen Dorantes” demise? Does what we call him in each of the tellings say anything about or make any difference in the endings to which we send him – mortal or otherwise. And do these different moral lessons derived from our partial knowledge stand out from the warning or admonition they provide as fomenting not a rumor mill but an eternal life, a literature? Who knows.

All things considered, Black Stephen, Estebanico, Stephen Dorantes, Stephen the Moor, the Black Moor; all these names add depth to a character profile: “Akinfemia, man with many names.”9 So-called ‘myths’ of Dorantes X’ life and invention, the tale of his fatal and fugitive yarn, however fictional, bristle with historicity, and conjure a literature that is not just the stuff of legend but also the record of a history of writing in the Americas that “eechhooeess.” The writing systems and narrative forms of Dorantes X’s

---

authorship that interest me most, I’ve included in his nickname, for the little crosses, that he sent back, the ad hoc invention of a language within the logic of a quest that was itself completely illogical, would seem to portend numerous ways in which Africans instituted and conducted communications in close quarters and across the infinite distances crossed by Literature.¹⁰

Robert Goodwin, fearing the charge of orientalism for speculating in the vein of this natural facility with understanding in the reported experience and forensic imagination with regard to Dorantes X’s parlance with the native inhabitants of Louisiana and Texas, explains his reasoning within the Western European contexts at his disposal to a very sound and credible, illuminating effect:

The apparent assertion that Native American and African religion and belief systems should be comparable or similar runs the risk, of course, of implying that

¹⁰ Dorantes was “sent on ahead to open up the way and pacify the Indians.” He traveled, we are told, in great splendor, arrayed in the colorful regalia of a medicine man with “bels and features on his arms and legs,” and accompanied by a large retinue of Indians, including a harem of beautiful women who swore by his magical powers. By pre-arrangement, Dorantes was to send back to the main party crosses of different sizes to indicate his position and his nearness to Cibola. “So the sayde Stephan [sic],” Father Marcos wrote later, “departed from mee on Passion-Sunday after dinner; and within foure dayse after the messengers of Stephan returned unto me with a great Crosse as high as a man, and they brought me word from Stephan, that I should forthwith come away after him, for hee had found people which gave him information of a very mighty Province, and that he had sent me one of the said Indians. This Indian told me, that it was thirtie dayes journey from the Towne where Stephan was, unto the first Citie of the sayde Province, which is called Ceuola. Hee affirmed also that there are seven great Cities in this Province, all under one Lord, the houses whereof are made of Lyme and Stone, and are very great . . . .” (Gates).
Africans and Indians were primitive peoples who shared a base, uncivilized humanity. This is the language of colonialism that was used to justify imperial oppression and explain empire as the civilizing mission of sophisticated Europeans. But my argument here is simply that European Christianity in the sixteenth century was intellectually determined to close off beliefs and ideas associated with other religions. This was especially true of Spain, where the Inquisition embodied a paranoid fear of spiritual difference. By contrast, American and African religions readily incorporated the gods and rituals of others into their own systems of belief. Even the great Islamic lords and kings of the sub-Saharan world recognized the power of pagan spirits. ...The archives of the Inquisition in Spain’s former colonies contain thousands of documents that demonstrate how easily Africans and Indians adopted each other’s beliefs and spirituality in addition to Christianity. But such spiritual promiscuity baffled and frightened the Spanish authorities, which, ironically, is why the Inquisition created the documentary record, preserving precious evidence of African-Indian relations. A century after the Narváez expedition was washed up on the shores of Texas, the Mexican Inquisition became especially concerned about a black witch doctor called Lucas Olola. The record of that case is merely one among many, but it is a good example of how Africans and Indians interacted (Goodwin, 247).

Yet it is also instructive of this notion of point of view, of perspective, in relation to narrative, interpretation, hermeneutics, and treasure-hunting to note how Peter Manseau treats the evidence under speculative scrutiny of the West African tradition of the marabouts (Manseau). If, as Goodwin points out, “The Spaniards told their tale so that it reflected well on them, and as their superiors expected to hear it,” (238) so does every telling match an audience and a worldview. Dorantes X may have even escaped through a loop in his yarn, making the seven cities an alibi in escape route, not a distraction, but an allegory for the flight of the soul and the tale of the thirty birds: did the Spanish know any Persian literature? Attar’s Conference of the Birds tells of the
quest of a band of different birds each in quest of the legendary bird, the Simurg, and
the seven valleys through which these birds must pass in their search.11

“+ + + + + +”
- Dorantes X

*Color is destiny.*
- Yoruba proverb

The butterfly effect of chapter XXXI of *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas,*

“The Black Butterfly,” I couldn’t help but cite in its majority here, because it is the non-
thetic performance of the thesis on black letters which escapes from the *idée fixe* of the

Poultice, a meandering detour through the key themes of transfiguration and origins of

blackness in Literature:

The next day as I was getting ready to go back down a butterfly entered my
bedroom, a butterfly as black as the other one and much larger. I remembered the
episode of the day before and laughed. ... The butterfly, after fluttering all about
me, alighted on my head. I shook it off. It went on to land on the counterpane and
because I chased it off again, it left there and settled on an old portrait of my father.
It was as black as night. The soft movement with which it began to move its wings
after alighting had a certain mocking way about it that bothered me a great deal. I
turned my back, left the room, but when I returned a few minutes later and found
it in the same spot I felt a nervous shock. I laid hands on a towel, struck it, and it
fell. It didn’t fall down dead. It was still twisting its body and moving its antennae.

11 See also: *The Seven Valleys, and the Four Valleys* (Bahá’u’lláh).
I regretted what I’d done, took it in the palm of my hand, and went over to put it down on the window sill. It was too late. The poor thing expired after a few seconds. I was a little upset, bothered, “Why the devil wasn’t it blue?” I said to myself. And that reflection—one of the most profound that has been made since butterflies were invented—consoled me for the evil deed and reconciled me with myself. I let myself contemplate the corpse with a certain sympathy, I must confess. I imagined that it had come out of the woods, having had breakfast, and that it was happy. The morning was beautiful. It came out of there, modest and black, having fun butterflying under the broad cupola of a blue sky, which is always blue for all wings. It came through my window and found me. I suppose it had never seen a man before. It didn’t know, therefore, what a man was. It executed infinite turns around my body and saw that I moved, that I had eyes, arms, legs, a divine look, colossal stature. Then it said to itself: “This is probably the inventor of butterflies.” The idea subjugated it, terrified it, but fear, which is also suggestive, hinted to it that the best way to please its creator was to kiss him on the forehead, and it kissed me on the forehead. When I drove it away, it went to land on the counterpane. There it saw my father’s picture and it’s quite possible that it discovered a half-truth there, to wit, that this was the father of the inventor of butterflies, and it flew over to beg his mercy. Then the blow of a towel put an end to the adventure. The blue immensity was of no use to it, nor the joy of the flowers, nor the splendor of the green leaves against a face towel, a foot of raw linen. See how fine it is to be superior to butterflies! Because, it’s proper to say so, had it been blue, or orange, its life wouldn’t have been any more secure. It was quite possible that I would have run it through with a pin for the pleasure of my eyes. It wasn’t. That last idea gave me back my consolation. I put my middle finger against my thumb, gave a flick, and the corpse fell into the garden. It was time. The provident ants were already arriving … No, I go back to the first idea: I think it would have been better had it been born blue (Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas 70).

If the butterfly’s blackness is its singularity marked against or by color, the ontic feat which alone distinguishes it from the sky, this transparency and social blending of which Brás Cubas is the human embodiment, might have saved it from perishing at that particular instant (some say only delaying the inevitable), but would have also erased it in the encompassing blue sea of sky, leaving nothing to rise, and ascend, transform, and
renew (much like the black butterfly, and entirely unlike the idée fixe of the Brás Cubas poultice).

Legba, like Esu, is the divine reader, whose interpretation of the Book of Fate determines precisely what this book says. The interpreter governs meaning because he determines our understanding of the text (Gates The Signifying Monkey: a Theory of African-American Literary Criticism 22-4).

In other words, everything is everything, enough said of the “infinite equation!” Everything has its own Esu and that is proof enough of the depth of mystery and the profound science of the Holy Odu from which so many American literatures spring. On to the readings of the oracle!
2. Chapter 1: Black Writing and The History of the Book to Come

The most fundamental absolute of the Yoruba is that there exist, simultaneously, three stages of existence: the past, the present, and the unborn. Esu represents these stages, and makes their simultaneous existence possible, “without any contradiction,” precisely because he is the principle of discourse both as messenger and as the god of communication.

- Henry Louis Gates, Jr. The Signifying Monkey

The time has not yet come for a complete history of the Negro peoples. Archeological research in Africa has just begun, and many sources of information in Arabian, Portuguese, and other tongues are not fully at our command; and, too, it must frankly be confessed, racial prejudice against darker peoples is still too strong in so-called civilized centers for judicial appraisement of the peoples of Africa. Much intensive

monographic work in history and science is needed to clear mooted points and quiet the controversialist who mistakes present personal desire for scientific proof.

- W. E. B. Du Bois, The Negro

In 1915, W. E. B. Du Bois formulated what a century later we may read as a warning and a promise in an analysis on the brink of prophecy: “the time for … a complete history” of “the peoples of Africa” had “not yet come,” but it would appear to be only a matter of time before the projected work would appear in toto, eclipsing a time that seemed to be suspended as light through a fog, eclipsing the vision in a “time of slavery” too dark in which to realize the composition of “a complete history” frozen in colonial time set in motion and lived by “those … who would write universal history and leave out Africa.” Turning his back to the audience of Voltaires and Hegelians, Du Bois faced the band and looked to the future toward the ongoing work of the great expanding past within a cosmological and epochal frame; the “Ancient of Days” (Du Bois) as “dangerous supplement” (Derrida Of Grammatology) to a “universal history” (Buck-Morss).

Within the time of the ongoing performance of the coming work’s completeness its composers and appraisers train the world for its reception – that is, the historiographical process of that work’s writing, in all of the contingency of the composition of “a complete history of the Negro peoples” – we have the accompaniment
of audience and traveling band. The jury of appraisers, readers and listeners still in
training, those who would conduce to the work’s completion, are also, like the book, of
the past, present, and future. And yet, for Du Bois, their eta depends upon the clearing
of the conditions of passage which are spiritual as much as they are social, material
insofar as they are of the everyday black life.

DuBois lamented in The Negro that the “time has not yet come for a complete
history of the Negro peoples,” due to the facts that “[a]archaeological research in Africa
has just begun, and many sources of information in Arabi[c], Portuguese, and other
tongues are not fully at our command,” and that, also, “it must be frankly confessed,
racial prejudice against the darker peoples is still too strong in so-called civilized centers
for juridical appraisement of the peoples of Africa” (DuBois): “Possibly, if the Public
will, a later and larger book may be more satisfactory on these points” (DuBois). The
project for archaeology, historiography and comparative literary study DuBois imagines
in the preface to The Negro announces the work as a kind of prolegomena of black study
and lays out for (or we might say splays the blueprints of) “a later and larger book” to
come. Du Bois’ historiographical lament thus enters into the writing of the “complete
history of the Negro peoples,” DuBois’ earlier question, Do you know “how it feels to be
a problem,” (Du Bois and Edwards) is thus quintessentially a question about what it
means to be a problem for history, as the problem of the \textit{historical} is such as that which cannot be decided, but remains open, unresolved.

The book to come, as a transcription of a peoples' collective life journey through time, both intrinsic to and outside, ‘sealing’ their time, would be a work of revelation in which those consigned to “the veil” (Du Bois and Edwards) of prejudice, pretense, and ignorance of the “so-called civilized centers” during a “time of slavery” and prejudice, to whom the truths of Africa were hidden as in the mists of time (S. V. Hartman). Already the relationship between a form of writing and theory of everything comes into view as a cosmology constructed from the ground up in a theory of history and of mind. A history of writing consigning Africa to margins or by negative exception, ultimately predicates blackness as a standard remediating factor and variable in modern rubrics for literacy and perception.

Fanon speaks of not having encountered his blackness until he experienced his thrownness: “I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects” (Fanon \textit{Black Skin, White Masks} 82). This condition of subjection through problematization and spectacle places him outside of himself in a world with \textit{others}. The glance and the nomenclature spark a moment of capture: “Look, a Negro!” in Fanon thus becomes a pot shot, a buckshot, a snapshot, as
Dr. Ashon Crawley once adroitly pointed out, a photographic image, a moment of capture and surprise!, a shudder (shutter) which closes from the eye of the child upon the body of the man reduced to a sign – but not reduced. “Objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder” (Adorno *Negative Dialectics* 13). The imaginary racial object that subjects him to (being and non-being as) a Negro, in this case, knowing in that instant how it feels to be a problem under the scrutiny of a momentary study, is not his own, but Fanon will acquire it. He will capture his own mechanism of capture. It is the study of Da Sign, the reflecting of the signifying being for whom being becomes significantly somebody else’s problem, for whom being becomes a non-issue in relation to the non-being of others. In the manner of not believing this or that tale, a faith selects the ground imagination traverses as history. It states, as a matter of faith and experience only after the fact of uninterruptable performance: “I am. Somebody.”

I will write Arabic and say Muslim prayers I will write Arabic and say Muslim prayers When the festival comes, I’ll worship my deity [Esu] I will write Arabic and say Muslim prayers. - Oriki Esu.

### 2.1 The Alienest and the Hidden Treasure

*It is the same with our own lives. If we see them from the outside, as the influence*
The short story, or satirical novella, by Machado de Assis, translated as “The Psychiatrist” by Helen Caldwell (Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis *The Psychiatrist, and Other Stories*) and as *The Alienist* in William Grossman’s translation (2012), “[f]irst appeared in the journal *A Estação* (Rio de Janeiro) in 1881 and was collected in the volume *Papéis Avulsos* in 1882” (Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis *The Alienist*). This places the work as a publication similar to *The Posthumous Memoirs* in the manner, style, and in close proximity of composition. It delights in the themes and registers of the soul and its care, the mind and its wellness – raising questions and testing limits and contradictions of these concepts *avant le lettre* of psychoanalysis.

The story also offers a puzzle akin to the treasure map in its opening chapter, which may be unraveled through perusal of the text, but which is also a treasure in itself both in the manner of its being placed between folds of meaning and reference, but also in the content and nature of that sequestered and secreted material. In Chapter I, “How Itaguai Acquired a Madhouse,” an omniscient narrator opens on an introduction to the distinguished personage of the psychiatrist in question: “The chronicles of Itaguai relate
that in remote times a certain physician of noble birth, Simão Bacamarte, lived there and that he was one of the greatest doctors in all Brazil, Portugal, and the Spains.” The good doctor was exemplary in his profession and of the age, even turning down prestigious royal appointments:

“Science,” he told His Majesty, “is my only office; Itaguai, my universe.”

He took up residence there and dedicated himself to the theory and practice of medicine. He alternated therapy with study and research; he demonstrated theorems with poultices.

In his fortieth year Bacamarte married the widow of a circuit judge…But Dona Evarista failed to satisfy her husband’s expectations. She produced no robust children and, for that matter, no puny ones either. The scientific temperament is by nature patient; Bacamarte waited three, four, five years. At the end of this period he began an exhaustive study of sterility. He reread the works of all the authorities (including the Arabian), sent inquiries to the Italian and German universities, and finally recommended a special diet. But Dona Evarista, nourished almost exclusively on succulent Itaguai pork, paid no heed; and to this lack of wifely submissiveness—understandable but regrettable—we owe the total extinction of the Bacamartian dynasty (Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis The Alienist).

A bizarre prescription, especially in light of having considered “all of the authorities (including the Arabian),” and probably absurdly hilarious for a reader who could glimpse in the trends and fashions of the nineteenth-century scientific and medicinal discourses some of the most remarkably odd and newfangled solutions to age old problems and questions: “The health of the soul!” he exclaimed. “The loftiest possible goal for a doctor.” Satire is comedy, after all, and the encomiast of lunacy’s great and inexhaustible delight is, to an extent, the laughter it seems the narrator might
cause even the writer. The lampoon here is of the state of nature, the status quo of modern society prior to the intervention of the psychiatrist, the founder of a new era:

The chroniclers chide the Itaguai Town Council for its neglect of the mentally ill. Violent madmen were locked up at home; peaceable lunatics were simply left at large; and none, violent or peaceable, received care of any sort. Simão Bacamarte proposed to change all this. He decided to build an asylum and he asked the Council for authority to receive and treat all the mentally ill of Itaguai and the surrounding area. He would be paid by the patient’s family or, if the family was very poor, by the Council. The proposal aroused excitement and curiosity throughout the town. There was considerable opposition, for it is always difficult to uproot the established way of doing things, however absurd or evil it may be. The idea of having madmen live together in the same house seemed itself to be a symptom of madness, as many intimated even to the doctor’s wife…and one of the Councilmen, who was opposed to the doctor’s undertaking, suggested that the clerk be relieved of a useless task.

The calculations are unnecessary,” he said, “because Dr. Bacamarte’s project will never be executed. Who ever heard of putting a lot of crazy people together in one house?”

But the worthy Councilman was wrong. Bacamarte built his madhouse on New Street, the finest thoroughfare in Itaguai. The building had a courtyard in the center and two hundred cubicles, each with one window. The doctor, an ardent student of Arabian lore, found a passage in the Koran in which Mohammed declared that the insane were holy, for Allah had deprived them of their judgment in order to keep them from sinning. Bacamarte found the idea at once beautiful and profound, and he had the passage engraved on the façade of the house. But he feared that this might offend the Vicar and, through him, the Bishop. Accordingly, he attributed the quotation to Benedict VIII (Machado de Assis, The Alienist).

Machado’s narrator, although omniscient in point of view of the story, is characteristically unreliable, like his brother or cousin, Brás Cubas, especially in that the narrator may differ however greatly in character and knowledge from the author, and that there may be in the co-presence of their conflicting or discoursing views, emerge a
second and third authority, narrator, reader, interpretation. The narrator, however, in
citation of Bacamarte’s literacies and research, and mentioning some of his prescriptions
and theories, includes the mention of a kind of orientalist strain in the archive of his
training and scholarship, however mercurial or irrelevant to his practice. What becomes
striking upon further perusal of Bacamarte’s sources (shared in common with the
author, no doubt), the source of the good doctor’s motto gracing the “façade of the
house,” is not actually the Koran. It is a well-known Hadith, an authoritatively
documented saying of the Prophet widely regarded as valid and equivalent in authority
to the Qur’an.

Simão Bacamarte’s misattribution, which may be carelessness, pseudo-science, or
folly, reveals itself as the possible double, or third valence of a narrator’s unreliability
and suggests the manipulation of the author who, knowing better, asks the reader to
find the mistake. Where’s Waldo, but for Sufis. This generalized reflection on the
“metaphysics of style” (Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis Stories), which is prompted by
the equivocal citation, draws attention to forms of translation, appropriation, and
passing that structure epistemological forms of invention, science, and industry in the
New World, but also new poetics. Whether or not the misattribution is an additional
cue or layer to Machado’s spiritual allegiances, his wily and generative manner of
making mysteries through citation demonstrate in this case more than anecdotal
knowledge. Context is for keys. “The pen is lifted in three” is the beginning and
colloquial name of a Hadith whose ultimate significance can be found only in relation to
larger metaphysical or ontological dimensions of existence as expressed repeatedly and
illuminated in the Qur’an with regard to what is writing and what is written by the ‘pen’
in order to explain the three cases of exception where the pen makes no mark:

The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) Said: “The Pen has been
lifted from three: from the sleeper until he awakens, from the child until he reaches
puberty and from the insane person until he comes to his senses -- or until he
comes around.” Narrated by Abu Dawood (4403), al-Nasaa’i (3432) and Ibn
Maajah (2041).

According to Alberto da Costa e Silva, in “Buying and Selling Korans in
Nineteenth-Century Rio de Janeiro, he writes that the celebrated Brazilian
anthropologists Nina Rodriguez and Roger Bastide were “incredulous about the
existence of a mosque maintained by Africans in Rio de Janeiro and of another in Sao
Paulo. Certainly, there was no public building dedicated to Islam” (Silva 84), but the
African Muslims had never been so numerous in Rio as in Salvador, where, according to
Rodriguez, one in every three of the old Africans, before the 1835 insurrection, was a
Muslim. By the mid-nineteenth century, “they were in sufficient numbers” in the city of
Rio de Janeiro, “to buy almost 100 copies of the Koran each year and to make the holy
book the bestselling import of Fauchon and Dupont’s bookshop” (88). In addition to
Arabic and Quranic studies in the city of Rio de Janeiro, DuBois could have begun the
study of other African tongues as demographic research in the future might easily
demonstrate that there were far more African tongues spoken in the city of Rio de Janeiro than there were European languages spoken there, and a larger population of speakers of Bantu languages than European polyglots.

2.2 Thanks!

In an infamously unremarked contribution to the warmth and color, soul and character of the Brazilian people as embodied by and witnessed in the person of Machado de Assis, his alter ego, the “Moleque of the Illustrated Week “ Moleque da Semana,” brings the diverse arts of this ecological inheritance of black letters to bear in the form of a fictitious letter to City Hall printed in his own very real and circulating Carioca periodical. “Agradecimento! / Thanks a lot!,” a sarcastic and uproarious tirade against lapsing public hygiene services provides perfect example of the motto of Semana Illustrada, riendo castigat mores, seeking to raise culture through humor. But in the contexts of the silencing and submerging of arche rewritings and historicities of black life and its currency in the Atlantic World’s self-construction, the allegorical subtext of the letter is unsettling, somber and ominous. This fact helps ground and balance out the humorous and silly veneer of the Moleque’s carnivalesque performance of wit and haptic critique through sound, language, style.

Thanks a bunch!
Jan 14, 1866 – Rio de Janeiro
The by-himself-undersigned, as head of the household of Madame La Negresse and all of her descendants, much like Pyramus, finds himself at a loss to adequately thank your Excellencies of the Illustrious City Hall for the favor of not ordering the elegant at S. Francisco Square to be covered, thus causing the ears of local merchants to ring with the abrasive uproar of the discontents who glimpse not in the crystalline pools forming in these hazardous craters the limpid image of your honors’ grace and affection. Nor do they grasp the patriotic method of your madness of thus advancing in these potholes the makings of a new frog farming industry.

Carry on, your Excellencies! But raise not your insurgent machetes against the criticisms borne of popular resentment and zealotry about the manner in which you, O, illustrious elected officials of the people, and cream of the crop of the ballot box, and you alone, know how to stretch mouth of roads into grimaces; not only those crevices at Minor Saints Square, but also the chasms on Fire and New Prince streets, for the recreation of all the residents and as an obstacle course to test the brute strength of those passersby who dare travel such insignificant public roads (Machado de Assis, Fleiuss and Bocaiuva).

Before getting to the end of the letter, which really goes to the next level, it’s useful to observe here that the public conscience and civil service rendered by Dr. Semana and the Moleque on this issue in the previous week’s publication satirized the delay and abandon in public works with an illustration on the cover.
Figure 1: Horrifying Fact: Illustration by Heinrich Fleiuss, text by Machado de Assis

The caption in Figure 1 announces a recent local occurrence depicted by the dramatis personae of the Moleque and his son:

Horrifying Fact

The moleque of the Semana, who with his oldest son went fishing in one of the famous sinkholes at S. Francisco Square reeled in a hat and a boot that were seemingly the property of some unfortunate who drowned in that abyss. Dr. Semana solicits the good will of the public and on behalf of a great destiny for all residents to order the appropriate authorities informed of this fact. If any doubt
yet lingers about what surfaced, it’s either a city councilman or a piece of crap (Machado de Assis, Fleiuss and Bocaiuva).13

Stone cold, dark humor on the 7th of January, lending some context to the tenor of the humor and critique of the comic weekly, turn to more affirmative tones with no less bravado in the Moleque’s own personal note. After all, this message has been very clearly, even regally, addressed by “the-by-himself-undersigned,” the one and only real McCoy, and what follows emphasizes to no small degree this tenacity, focus, and daring on the part of the writer. Even from such a well-connected publishing house as the Imperial Artistic Institute of Rio de Janeiro that despite royal patronage, national distribution and international subscribers, managed to remain always edgy in ways that cause wonder and admiration. Also, despite the power, duration, and insight of their prolific provocations now reviewable from a different generation, it is possible to see the similarities between the challenges they faced and our own times, which repeat configurations lampooned in the Semana Illustrada. For one thing is remarkable about the content of these documents aside from what they contain, yet which is still contained in them – and that is the silence to which they have been consigned and so remain, even in

13 (Semana Illustrada, Jan 7, 1866, no. 265).
their open availability, yet secret, hidden, and unread. Probably for reasons pertaining to their content.

The second half of the Moleque’s personal text and letter to the editor in his own name stands in this context for the racial, cultural, and symbolic repertoires of resistance, critique and passing employed by the black reader / writer sounding off in code- and language-switching, in the chthonic impression of the Afrosonic ensemble of word and melody, breath and instrument, rhythm and message. In order to share that reading with a public, a state, and a city, all of which become enfolded within his address, claimed and called out by the enoncé of his native tongue, the Moleque speaks to them in a lingua franca of the Brazilian soul in a manner that produces a kind of counter-narrative to establishment histories of the Brazilian Republic as primarily a European people and Old World holdover. In other words, writing in the Semana Illustrada, O Moleque is making a mountain out of a molehill, or an inquisition out of an inquiry into the mysteries of what lies buried, fallen, and submerged in these potholes and sinkholes in the city streets and squares:

Onward, Excellencies, with your holy labor until, by the end of the year, our entire city may be decked in the emerald moss spreading from the turbid surfaces of these funny little pools. In addition to this municipal tribute, your Excellencies shall be regaled by comedy and hymns of my own composition, chanted to the sound of urucungos, marimbás, berimbau, tambourines and caquinhas. Your Excellencies may join me now in singing:

“Zoilos, I came, I saw, I conquered you!
Moleque, the great singer, praises us.”

Posterity is yours, gentlemen. I regret that the same cannot be said for three of your colleagues. One of them doesn’t measure up, I can’t stand the sight the other, and I wouldn’t have anything to do with the first of the three, even if he prayed to [or became possessed by] all the saints. They don’t like monkey shines, so I won’t grind the organ.

[Signed,]

the Moleque (Machado de Assis, Fleiuss and Bocaiuva).

The reverse psychology or tongue in cheek sarcasm of the Moleque in the fullness of the letter quoted above cannot be dismissed merely as an empty threat or a fictive lampoon: the offer still stands. Whether a threat, or a curse, the medicine, the music, and the protest have been promised, scheduled, and always already fully delivered; the trojan horse of black letters making language move beyond the barriers invented for its containment.

The litany of instruments to be involved in the tributary performance lauding the inaction of the city hall in the matter of resolving the matter of the holes in streets and narratives itself proves the primacy, coherence, and inherence of the African to the scene of the municipal, the national, and the Lusophone concatenated and interpenetrating there in the city of Rio with all its bumpy, holy roads. The litany of instruments is a list, a set, and a shipment of African loanwords to the Portuguese making that one in which they are spoken natively a Brazilian one, born, as if from the idea of the capitatis and the history of the polis: “In addition to this municipal tribute, your Excellencies shall be
regaled by comedy and hymns of my own composition, chanted to the sound of
urucungos, marimbas, berimbaus, tambourines and caquinhos.”

If the soul of Haiti is Vodun, and the soul of Vodun is its music, then the soul of
Brazil is Candomble, and the soul of Candomble is its music. But if, like Haiti and Brazil,
Vodun and the Candomble are discourses of the sacred deeply tied to music, here is a
list of some of the instruments they share in common in the music which they, in
making on their own make together and exchange: “urucungos, marimbas, berimbaus,
tambourines and caquinhos.” If “Ooga booga will hoo doo you,” just imagine what
berimbaus will do! Thanks!

And then I would operate such that it
would become absolutely illegible for
you. You will recognize nothing
yourself, you will feel nothing, and when
you read even I will pass unnoticed.
After this final murder we will be more
alone than ever, I will continue to love
you, living, beyond you.
- Derrida, The Post Card

Semana Illustrada as a repository of the aforementioned hidden treasures of Bantu
and Yoruba, of Islamic and ancient Greek, of Byzantine and Bavarian origins, all mixed
together in the cauldron of Machado’s inveterate eclecticism and his compatriot’s take
on the pandemonium of new world synthesis and encounter, working out the anxieties,
desires and generational shifts in the forms of fantasy, racial imagination, orientalism, and black humor illustrated in the weekly and reflected from the social psyche of the Brazilian empire’s lustrous and tragic capital. Those treasures include the evidence of the *prima materia* of organic concepts from living languages which – as plain as signifiers’ meaning is defined in relation to other signifiers in the linguistic system – requires, at the very least, nominal access to the discursive domain within which those words, as letters, appear in the alphabet of the other’s monolingualism. The African other is always polyglot.

One needs a Bantu dictionary, not just one language, but a comprehensive multi-lingual dictionary of words of bantu-origin to read the Brazilian Portuguese of the *Semana Illustrada*, or the works of the exclusive and official government name Machado de Assis. But this fact not bringing pride to the public, its significance and lusciousness have been wretchedly neglected to an impermissible abandon unsustainable for the truth of posthumous persona(r)e. Stranger and more interesting than fiction, the posthumous endure the suspense of disbelief by the same stride that they lift it; ringing out though through stone and darkness, waking sleepers in the cave to the in/formation of the underground sound. It’s not a worm or a snake, it’s (the digital/) underground man!

*Can one not think of apparatuses where subjectification does not come about*
through aristocratic life or the aestheticized existence of the free man, but through the marginalised existence of the 'outsider'?

- Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault

What was the press? It was a fire from the sky stolen by a new Prometheus which came to animate the statue of the ages. It was a flash of the spirit that came to unite an annihilated race with an enlivened generation by way of an improved medium. At once indestructible, mobile, more eloquent, virile, it was capable of penetrating the distant reaches of immortality.

- Machado de Assis, “The Journal and the Book”

2.3 Lights, Camera, Legba: Machado Black from the Dead

In a world that is really upside down the true is a moment of the false.
- Guy Dubord, Society of the Spectacle

Machado’s stories and tales, poems and commentaries, reviews and critical work, for all their varied cultural material and universal resonance, lay bare a colonial topography of a crossroads Fanon elaborates in The Wretched of the Earth as the “geographical layout” of “a world cut in two…which allows us to mark out the lines on
which a decolonized society will be reorganized” (Fanon *The Wretched of the Earth* 38). Because “the zone where the natives live is not complementary to the zone inhabited by the settlers” (38), these “two zones are opposed … not in the service of a higher unity,” but in a dialectic which must be worked out historically for a time to come.

The special dilemma for Brazil of how to read Machado de Assis in view of Brazil’s own bi-furcated history, however, comes into view in a recent television advertisement produced by CEF Bank in commemoration of 150 years of its history which drew upon the historical association of Machado de Assis with the bank during his tenure as founding member and first president of the Brazilian Academy of Letters. This commercial representation, which has become a humorous scandalon in the Brazilian popular culture and social media in recent years, reveals by way of Machado’s own posthumous persona(r)e, the racial crisis of Brazilian identity.

The commercial first aired in September of 2011 and begins with a narrator addressing the audience on the topic of Machado’s immortality, as if a common logic and natural law of the Brazilian cosmos: “Thinking of the future is something so important that even the immortals do it. Known as the ‘witch of Cosme Velho,’ Machado de Assis was the founder and the first president of the Brazilian Academy of Letters. Yet the universe of letters was not the only place where the greatest Brazilian writer distinguished himself.” The live action that transpires during this narration
depicts an old, grey-bearded, light-skinned man walking through the streets of Rio de Janeiro dressed in hat and suit, switching from voiceover to diegetic speech as a bank attendant addresses an old man in the twilight of his life. Addressing the pale and ghostly figure, the bank clerk greets him: - "Dr. Machado, how may I serve our illustrious writer?"

The narrator explains that Machado has come to do what he does every month while the actor completes the phrase, “to make a deposit to the account of the Brazilian Academy of Letters,” handing a neatly sealed envelope to the clerk. The voiceover narration concludes by way of summary to state that the story of Machado and the Caixa endured for years, so much so that the Caixa was mentioned in one of his last writings; his will and testament! As if this mixture of personal business and commercial affairs were in itself a cause of celebration, the narrator exults in this last measure still further and more robustly declares the relationship public: “150 years of the Caixa [Econômica Federal] - a story written by all Brazilians.”

When the television commercial aired not all Brazilians felt they had been consulted in the IPO. An uproar in social media and the press contended that Machado had been “turned white” (“virou branco”) in the bank’s treatment, provoking intervention at last from The Department of Policy and the Promotion of Racial Equality of the Federal Government (SEPPIR). This government agency ordered the recall of the
commercial on finding sympathy for the public outcry of racial misrepresentation of Machado’s person, heritage, and likeness.

Subsequently, in an official statement to the public by Jorge Hereda, the president of the Caixa Econômica Federal, apologized “to the entire population and in particular, to the race-related movements, for not having characterized the writer, who was “afro-Brásileiro” (Afro-Brazilian), with his racial origins. The CEF reaffirms that, in its 150 years of existence, it has always sought to portray in its advertising, all of the racial diversity that characterizes our country.” If the first representation of Machado indicated whiteness as an appropriation of “150 years” of experience, the second commercial, ordered by the state to replace the “white” Machado repeats misrepresentational by a greater emphasis on elision. The next advertisement strongly resembles the former in almost every respect, retaining mostly the same script except for the spoiler with a twist: Machado will not be white.

The composition of the audience has shifted in direct proportion with the costuming, script and air time for the old witch, who is no longer referred to by terms of endearment or enigma. Now, although the characters are the same, the play is different. Rather than opening with discussion of planning for the future, as if articulating the historicity of Brazil’s eugenics project of “whitening” meant to enshrine the ideal of
“racial democracy,” and product of this colorist notion of the concept of the “mulatto-escape hatch” (Valle Silva in Fontaine and Center for Afro-American).

In version two, with the substitution of a dark-skinned Afro-Brazilian actor, made to look ‘old’ in the manner of a different phenotype through awkward makeup, a colorblind corrective proposes to assuage dissident ideological elements. Now in the commercial made to replace the boys from Brazil version, a terse narrator now explains the mise en secen of Dolemite Machado walking with profound gravity, and with ostensibly unnecessary modifications to the script: “With regards to the history of the Caixa and with regard to the history of the Brazilian people, we present: Machado de Assis.”

The repetition sounds a disclaimer: CEF, “A story written by all Brazilians.” The split-in-two-ness of the contemporary Brazilian society is an image of the colonial and racial division of American slavery societies, as much as the literary consumption of Machado’s lifework, the segregated mediation of the representation of literacy. In this instance of cognitive dissonance, the reproach for Machado’s appropriation by whiteness amounts to a faint disruption, and the “seeing-double” Machados de Assis’ the tip of the iceberg of his African diaspora severalness, suggests a national treasure buried in a field and sold away. Yet, Machado has the last laugh – whether or not the first case caused him humor or misery.
The properties of national consciousness become expropriated by the resistance of the cinematographic object of Machado’s immortality, a presidential jack in the box (‘Caixa’), emblem of a nation that cannot even pass for white, mirrors but guards against the sorcery of color to which his image would be put, with an insurrection in the name of his singularity, his blackness, his oneness. The resistance of the object of Machado de Assis, in this instance, seems to be the last laughter of Esu.

In the first pass, an historical farce was brought to light and refused by the day - upon Machado’s death certificate, the untrue, but perhaps conventional white lie of the coroner’s report, writing in “branco” for the race of the deceased sealed Machado in whiteness on the official record. This kind of obvious half-truth embraced by public and social instruments of some variety, nevertheless has no monopoly on the frank and earnest engagements with Machado that inaugurate his biographical and critical secondary oeuvre. Thus, and in light of the Afrocentric reclamation of Machado in recent generations prior to this dissertation, preparing the way for a social consciousness inflexible in the public representation of an historical figure of national treasure and heritage. Thus, in the second pass, Machado becomes black again in an official, public, and international way, 150 years later after a dusty domiciliation within the cosmetic lie of the coroner’s report and the banking industry, and, basically just whiteness. It’s not as
though he hadn’t understood and anticipated the willful confusion of the Brazilian
“public,” he had written his entire oeuvre about it:

This myth is probably the most well-known of the Esu canon. Indeed, it is one of
the canonical narratives that survived the Middle Passage and is as familiar among
the Yoruba cultures of Brazil and Cuba as it is in Nigeria. As Ogundipe correctly
concludes, “The conceptualization of Esu’s presence as a dynamic principle and
his representation as the principle of chance or uncertainty has endured in both
the Old and New Worlds.”60 There are several variants of this Esu myth of the
indeterminate, recorded from Nigeria to Brazil and Cuba. Ogundipe’s version is a
full one, revealing the reading given the text by the babalawo’s concluding verse:
Everyone knows the story of the two friends who were thwarted in their
friendship by Esu. They took vows of eternal friendship to one another, but neither
took Esu into consideration. Esu took note of their actions and decided to do
something about them.

When the time was ripe, Esu decided to put their friendship to his own little test.
He made a cloth cap. The right side was black, the left side was white. The two
friends were out in the fields, tilling their land. One was hoeing on the right side,
the other was clearing the bushes to the left. Esu came by on a horse, riding
between the two men. The one on the right saw the black side of his hat. The friend
on the left noticed the sheer whiteness of Esu’s cap. The two friends took a break
for lunch under the cool shade of the trees. Said one friend, “Did you see the man
with a white cap who greeted us as we were working? He was very pleasant,
wasn’t he?” Yes, he was charming, but it was a man in a black cap that I recall, not
a white one.” “It was a white cap. The man was riding a magnificently caparisoned
horse.” “Then it must be the same man. I tell you, his cap was dark–black.” “You
must be fatigued or blinded by the hot rays of the sun to take a white cap for a
black one.” “I tell you it was a black cap and I am not mistaken. I remember him
distinctly.”

This most common myth of Esu has been glossed in several ways, as if its encoded
indeterminacy has blinded even the most astute commentators to a meaning even
more fundamental than any literal rendering of its allegory allows. For this myth
ascribes to Esu his principal function of the indeterminacy of interpretation (Gates
The Signifying Monkey a Theory of African-American Literary Criticism 33).
Indeterminacy as a cosmic mediator of all things implies its opposite, a law of
determination, or fate, confluent with the facticity and materiality of difference. Context
is for keys, and the modes of the instrument's use reveals its capacity to perform an
indeterminate range of textual and oracular performances, not the least of which
includes all communication - especially between what humans have perceived or
catalogued as different kingdoms and separate beings, and between worlds and spirits.
That's so much more than human beings can comprehend or manage, muster or analyze
- which, significantly, is because it is the provenance of a divinity, the literature of a
Scripture, and the essence of the one universal faith of God.

*The Imprisonment of Obatala* (Ijimere and Beier) draws upon the Oriki differently,
placing the encounter between friends in the relation between Obatala and Shango, and
Esu’s trickery as a mystic obstacle on Obatala’s journey to see "the fire in the eyes" of his
friend, the King of Oyo. As Dr. Ainehi Edoro once pointed out in conversation about the
theoretical work of the *dramatis personae* of *The Imprisonment of Obatala*, the play’s
protagonist, the Obatala, also known as Orisa Nla, the Great Orisa, draws by his actions
and behavior a great contrast with some of the more bombastic characters of the play;
Obatala doesn’t insist on the color of the third man’s cap - he uses affliction to reflect,
even submitting to a good beat down by the farmer, ever-mindful of Exu’s governance
of the circuitous paths of destiny. The humility and forbearance Obatala exhibits
characterize his *dramatis persona* and the theological principles to which each Orisha corresponds in its ownmost relation to the fundamentals of existence in their change and play. “The farmer thinks the monkey is not wise,” Obatala sings as he repairs through the forests outside the Kingdom of Oyo en route to the joy of black gathering: “*but the monkey is wise, he just has his own logic*” (Ijimere and Beier 17). Which one is the farmer and which is the monkey? Which Obatala sees which Esu? Who goes there?

The question of literature, the question of who, becomes utterly phenomenological beyond the implication of subjectivity, the reading of each name and word, the assigning of meaning in this process, what intelligence is brought to bear on the determinations and indeterminacies of making meaning within such vertiginous contexts in which each textual presentation constructs a representation itself entirely independent of the other? The question is: who is speaking? Who is reading? In this regard, Gates’ text balances what he calls “indeterminacy” with the “idea of multiplicity”:

This idea of multiplicity is extraordinary: not only does each of the deities (the Orisa, the ebora, and the irunmale) have an Esu, but so too does each Odu. Indeed, as one Odu, “The Orisi and Odu Which Accompanied Them with Their Esu,” states, “Anybody who does not have an Esu in his body cannot exist, even to know that he is alive.” How does one know one’s Esu (Gates *The Signifying Monkey a Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*)?
If this sounds like a thing out of place (coisa for a do lugar), it totally is: Gates explains that the matter is not quite so transparent for human beings, but the immortals of the invisible realm got it on lock:

This is a fairly straightforward matter for the orisa, the eborra, and the irunmale, who “can see themselves together with their Esu in order that they can send them anywhere to perform everything they need, according to Esu’s ways and duties.” Human beings, however, cannot see their own Esu, just as they can no longer recall the destiny (ori) whispered to them by Olodumare precisely as they are about to be born. Human beings, therefore, must consult the Odu and sacrifice to Esu, so that “the Esu should do his work in such a way that the person be helped so as to bear a good name and to have power to develop.” An individual’s Esu is an immense power to be summoned, “a medicine of supernatural power for each person” (Gates *The Signifying Monkey a Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* 42).

This advanced level technology of Yoruba philosophy and Orisa religion is a remarkable key that Gates turns, however, to priestly exegesis of the metaphysical fold within which the human encounter with Esu is both ineluctable inheritance and cosmic destiny:

As the Odu elaborate, “When a person will say that he is able to level mountains or to turn forests into savannahs instantly, it is the Esu of each person that renders such help.” Esu, in other words, represents power in terms of the agency of the will. But his ultimate power, of which even the will is a derivative, is the power of sheer plurality or multiplicity; the myths that account for his capacity to reproduce himself ad infinitum figure the plurality of meanings that Esu represents in the process of Ifa divination. Esu as the figure of indeterminacy extends directly from his lordship over the concept of plurality (43).
Machado’s uncanny resemblance to the antagonist of Obatala’s departure and return journey from Ile Ife – he endures a day that is unrecognizably contorted and distorted ontologically out of joint in a way strangely familiar to his eternal contemporaries: “There are ears to hear some people – but how could I ever think there were ears to hear me? – My day won’t come until the day after tomorrow. Some people are born posthumously” (Nietzsche, Ridley and Norman 3). After Nietzsche’s idea, but not his discovery, the posthumous people, at the bidding of a yet unrealized force of natality, come to life in the midst of an ongoing act of narrative which closes in on the illegible.\textsuperscript{14}

\footnotesize \textsuperscript{14} See: (Young)
3. Chapter 2: “In the Ark” with Machado: Arche-Writings of the Abyss

The firefly danced in the air impatiently:
"Oh how I wish that I could be that yellow,
That burns in the eternal blue, a candle far!"
And yet the star gazed on the moon with jealousy:
"If only I could copy such transparency,
Which, from the Grecian column to the Gothic sill,
Has contemplated lovers' faces sighingly!"
And yet the moon gazed on the sun with bitter will:

“Oh misery! If I could be that giant ball,
Immortal clarity, the sum of all that's light!"
The sun, though, leans his brilliant chaplet o'er the wall:

"I'm burdened by this numen's aureole bright. I'm wearied by this blue, unbounded parasol. Why could I not be born a firefly at night?
- Machado de Assis, “Vicious Circle”¹

3.1 Re: Genesis: Archeological Revelations of the Missing Machado de Assis

¹Machado de Assis published this poem in 1878, it was translated into English in the 2015 publication of the critical work by: (Rocha and Thomson-DeVeaux).
In the engaging critical study, *Machado de Assis: Toward a Poetics of Emulation*, Castro Rocha turns to the well-worked notion of “eternal return” embedded in the bios and condition of possibility of the posthumous to isolate the spark in the poem “Vicious Cycle,” published by Machado de Assis in 1878 (Rocha and Thomson-DeVeaux). If the seasonal, cyclic, calendrical nature of life itself provides the framework for the vicious cycles of manifestation of being and ideas, Machado’s prolific oeuvre would expand exponentially along lines opened up by the coincidence of rhythm and tonality in the telling of myth and the construction of story as means for study beyond sameness. “The vicious circle,” Castro Rocha writes:

refers to the eagerness to copy the other so perfectly as to be confused with it, an impulse that inevitably puts rivalry at center stage. Perennially dissatisfied with what we are, we project onto the other—seen as an insuperable model—the image of the fullness that we lack. The French thinker René Girard called this desire to be the other “metaphysical,” a paroxysm of mimetic desire. The circle closes in an eternal recurrence of the same: the distinction between the firefly and the sun is one of scale, not nature (Rocha and Thomson-DeVeaux).

Despite their shared characteristics in nature, however, one could say that the firefly and the sun remain distinct not only in scale. Their nature differs even within the logics and meanings of the poem despite their co-relation as objects and sources of light, as occasions of temporal durée, and, as Castro Rocha observes, “eternal return.” This concept captured and worked over by Nietzsche would link through indirect and underground means to his own development of the condition and concept of the “posthumous people.”
In 1878, Machado launched the short story “Na Arca: Tres Inéditos Capítulos do Genesis,” signed by the name of “Eleazar” in the pages of the local literary magazine *O Cruzeiro*. Standing out as one of the most notable examples of the author’s unique style and narrative voice, John Gledson included “In the Ark” as the first of twenty short stories in his acclaimed anthology of original translations of Machado’s short fiction. In this piece, which Gledson describes in his introduction to the collection as an early work in the development of a world master of the literary form in question, the genre and form of the entry are as significant to Machado’s message as the dramatic content and the manner of its presentation. Ironic, then, that this literary work so emblematic of Machado’s sound and style in “In the Ark: Three Missing Chapters of Genesis,” would at first be an anonymous submission, only officially acknowledged by the author with its inclusion in the 1882 collection Papéis Avulsos (*Uncollected Works*), an anthology that also included among others that have been translated into English, “The Mirror,” “A Visit from Alcibiades,” and “The Fortune Teller” (each translated by Gledson), and opening with the novella “The Alienist” or “The Psychiatrist.”

In both the eponymous short story of Gledson’s collection of original translations and the short story of interest in this essay, the recurrence of the word and a subtle rumbling play in the background and etymology of its poetics: The word ‘chapter,’ in Portuguese, *capítulo*, designates in both languages a book section at the surface level, yet
in the Latinate root, the essential meaning of capitas; capital, capitol, head, and citizen. At
the very least, a chapter of hats suggests a set containing variables, a list, and a series;
such techniques of the literary apparatus, while not reinventing the wheel of the book or
the legend, revive and repeat it in a “poetics of emulation.” Yet mimesis is far from the
only feature of the spectacle in the mix of Machado’s literary simulacra. For even in the
missing chapters of Genesis we will read in the arc with Machado, we can see
improvisation not as ornament but as navigation, and second sight as the visionary
orientation.2 With the centering of Judaic Scripture as the prima materia of the narrative
tableau, taking for granted its authority and truth, Machado’s story economically and
furtively engages with mythic structures of the Abrahamic tradition to which Jewish,
Christian, and Muslim believers would be privy without confirming or denying any
such identity and parlaying the notably Scriptural tale in a public forum wherein the
agnostic or secular reader might engage selectively with a myth of origins.

____________________

2 Capitolina, the name of Dom Casmurro’s beloved and muse, victim and screen, derives her own name
from the poetics of this word – chapter / capitulo, which all revolve around a conceptual poetics
Machado’s narrators leave unelaborated in the text. In the affectionate diminutive of Capitolina, “Capitu,”
additional words appears to emerge in use in Machado’s word play. If Ça-pi-tu-lo means chapter, Capitu is
the name of Dom Casmurro’s childhood sweetheart, then when Capitu reflects with her “undertow eyes,”
something is being spoken in silence, and certainly not in English; perhaps not even in Portuguese by the
poem and the name, the thinking and reflecting of Capi + tu! The head and thee. The thou and the oriz!
Grafting itself to the root system of an ancient myth of origins figured in its familiarity as a universal, if not planetary discourse, “In the Ark: Three Missing Chapters of Genesis,” is a work which, as its title broadcasts and proclaims, performs the ongoing, unfolding work of cosmogony where: “to be a work means: to set up a world” (Heidegger). The story’s message and impact derive, however, not from the mere autonomous status of the work of art as a work of fiction, but from an ancillary if not competing claim as to the work’s generic status as a text; as a supplement which is both an addition and a remembering, a recollection and an unprecedented arch-ive. As a supplement to Genesis, the short story acquires – in the theory given by titular conceit – the status of real or fictive “archaeological revelation,” a recovered or a found text such as The Dead Sea Scrolls, The Gnostic Gospels.³ Performatively ensconced within an established tradition of revelation, hermeneutics and liturgy, “In the Ark,” gives voice to a multiplicity announcing both Machado’s personally distinctive literary sound, emanating on all sides with the soteriological vocation of black letters.

³ “The oldest definitely known use of the discovery motif occurs in papyri of the Egyptian Book of the Dead written during the 18th ancient Egyptian dynasty, or early in the fifteenth century BCE. In these instances, spells designed to assist the departed soul in its afterlife journeys are presented as even more ancient inscriptions that the fifteenth-century scribes purport to have discovered inscribed in temples of the god Thoth, written in the god’s own hand.” (Brown 5)
From the point at which the thought experiment of supplementing origin becomes a literary exercise, the essence of literature has also been revealed as “the non-thetic performance of the thesis.” To supply the missing with means of appearance by reading – in between the lines of caesura and ellipsis – to unearth and retrieve by writing and putting down – even by beginning under the dome of this concept of supplementing the ark – Machado’s emendation translates the invisible absence into ecstatic vision, prophetic song. The story begins thus:

1. Then Noah said to his sons Shem, Ham and Japhet: ‘We will leave the ark, according to the will of the Lord, we, and our wives, and all the animals. The ark will come to rest on top of a mountain; there we will disembark.

2. ‘Because the Lord hath kept his promise, when he said unto me: I have resolved to blot out all living flesh; evil rules the earth, and I wish to make all men perish. Make a wooden ark; enter into it yourself, your wife and your sons.

3. ‘And your sons’ wives, and a pair of all the animals.

4. ‘Now, therefore, the Lord’s promise has been fulfilled, and all men have perished, and the fountains of the heavens have closed; we will disembark on the earth again, to live in peace and harmony’ (Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis)

The prose is numbered in stanzas suggesting verse that formally rehearses the gestures and invokes the historicity of the technical apparatus of the religious transmission of Christian scripture – that is, that imitates and replaces the Church as writing machine, a deconstruction of Christianity in the break between spirit and law of the letter. The repetition of sacrosanct conventions whereby to extend, not disrupt, but to cultivate the furtherance of Genesis makes for an inverted heresy, a smashing of
stashes in the temple, trampling sedimented rituals of meaning-making become
enshrining enclosure left to forgetting and rote memorization. The dangerous
supplement, liberating truth from the form of its presentation, becomes itself a work of
impetus and reinvention, a regenesis in its own right; a literary machina ex deus.

Inter-religious scholar and researcher in Medieval Islamic literature Vahid Brown
has shown in an impressive survey on the topic how a vast and diverse set of texts
sharing this attribute of “In the Ark,” of lay claim to the status of found document.
Either presenting as the primary documents of a recovered absence or as translations of
discovered writings, such publications and transmissions appeal to the status of material
evidence bearing immediate generic and authoritative claims to authenticity, regardless
of their degree of veracity and credibility. Found texts suggest themselves as meta-
discursive sources of information. “Though largely unstudied,” he writes,

this species of textual revelation is extremely widespread, attested in disparate
literatures spanning the globe and thousands of years of history. While many of
these cases have nothing to link them save their utilization of the claim of
(generally fantastic) textual discovery, there are underlying topoi and motif-
elements that do in fact connect an astonishingly broad swath of this mammoth
literature, such that we can think of archeological revelation as a sort of tradition
– or counter-tradition, a discontinuous continuity of a religious underground that
poses interesting challenges to our conception of religious tradition
…Archeological revelation is specific; beyond the mundane detail of having been
found, the where, who and when of the framing discovery narratives are central
to the appeal and authority of these texts (Brown).

The motif and operations of this genre, while seeming to name and situate the form and
genre of Machado’s short story better than the coinage of John Gledson (“counter-
parable"), some aspects of the author’s definition don’t match up. Brown argues, for example, that:

Archaeological revelations do not derive authority from a sacred source “from the time of the origins of the tradition,” nor are they transmitted via a chain of personal transmission. Indeed, one of the most compelling features of archeological revelations is their explicit attempts at compensating for the lack of any such continuity, at generating authority or legitimacy in the absence of this sense of tradition.

The story, signed by Eleazar, makes no explicit reference to the composition of the chapters – their common genitive “missing” and the form of their presentation in verse submit them as found objects. The data, which “In the Ark” supplies to science and theology, history and literature, demands immediate scrutiny and promises direct moral relevance on the basis and through the warrant of such a claim that its form immanently substantiates. Brown argues that “[a]rcheological revelations do not present themselves as links in a venerable chain, as arising from a continuous tradition of the transmission of wisdom,” but, on the other hand “seem [rather] to offer themselves, and the primordial, …wisdom that they claim to speak for, as alternatives to the very notion of tradition itself.” Machado and Eleazar’s Arks somehow do the work of both archaeological revelation and prophetic enunciation; the extension of origins (“at the same time”) by postscript, giving the last word on history to the posthumous voices at its start.

Predicated by the caesura of supplement and its work of remediation, the subtle intrusion upon the sources of authority that authentic and fantastic archeological
revelations accomplish argue for the revaluation of the received wisdom accrued to the
archive and suspend the authority of tradition in the newly risen song of the ancient
mariner. Suggesting renewal through review of tradition’s contents and purporting
consequences for transmission hitherto lost to both the records of history and its future
provisions, “In the Ark” risks heresy in order to reflect upon a narrative of the divine. In
turning back upon itself, crescent-like gyre, “In the Ark” then could be read as in the
narrative arc or even in the archaeological revelation of Genesis; both as sacred ur-text and
cosmic origin myth. The beginning of recorded history and the maiden voyage of the
great ancestor and archon Noah represent both the salvation and foundation, as the
animals and human lives he saves represent both the last of those left on earth as
antediluvian survivals and the first progenitors, founders of primordial origin. This
realization is necessary in order to construct the tension and extend the coherence of this
episode in the Genesis creation saga, where the mythic vessel of Noah’s cosmogonic
passage represents both the salvation of those in the hold of the Ark. The fragile halo of
life it represents and enfolds fathoms the precarious link of descent and the fragile
thread of buoyant quest upon which all future on earth will have forever depended. In
the time of the writing of the abyss and the moment of its crossing, the ark and the abyss
are caught between everything and nothing.
In the archaeological revelation of the found text, then, *Genesis*, as a narrative and a process, continues advancing a set of retrospective claims about the founding events and processes of historical time and human evolution – aglow in the initial and ongoing act of creation. In spite of its singular intervention as a work of fiction, then, this short story discovers or reveals what would be, on one hand, the inevitable result of any act of writing: it continues to rework and forward the ongoing activities of creation. On the other hand, the story’s basic claim is to a singularity guaranteeing its antiquity in belonging to the time of the original work’s composition – somewhere between books seven and eight of *Genesis*. “In the Ark” slipped imperceptibly into the discourse of cosmogony, reterritorializing the static genetics of religious transmission. How, one wonders, could anything possibly be missing from *Genesis*? What will the remediated inclusion of these “three missing chapters” add not just to our understanding of everything that is descended from the Book, but all that *Genesis* explains about its consequences for the world?

If the deluge is the litmus test of physical and spiritual survival in toto of a species and its kindred, a life and the ecology of its environment – the wind in the sails of nihilation’s crossing is nothing but the prophetic breath of Noah and his performance in response to the legendary calling of his mission. The risks and the stakes of his invention and invitation to the beasts and humans portrays the perilous conditions
under which a covenant is formed between the Great Creator and a fledgling humanity. The moment Noah proclaims his covenant, his three sons, Ham, Shem and Japhet begin to offer competing narratives for what territories of the sunken place they will inhabit after the flood. Ham and Noah are notably assigned the region of the earth “on the side of the rising sun,” whereas Shem and Japhet resolve to distribute between the two of them and their families the Western land “on the side of the setting sun” (Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis). Shem and Japhet immediately begin to dispute over this western portion. While the brothers agree to a division of their properties, the measurements and demarcation of the borders of their territories cannot be agreed upon.

If *Genesis* is the Alpha of Creation stories in the colonial library, it resides side by side with myths of sacred and religious, poetic and divine origin improvised by peoples all over the world who, through their own medicines and sciences of the ancient past and cosmic origin, comment upon and supplement foundational epistemes and phenomenological orientations of their cultures. In the Genesis narrative of the Ark so resonant in the black Atlantic World’s own experiences of passage and deluge, motifs of exile, disaster, and extemporaneous transport across the abyss of the flood, and the wastelands of destruction recall a past that itself seems to resound with the shudder of an apocalyptic negation experienced in history and at the same time out of time in the catastrophe’s wake. In giving the names of Noah’s sons, an additional valence obtains in
the allegorical registers of this speculative ur-text, shedding light on a history of Biblical interpretation that coincides with and attempts to authorize discourses of scientific racism justifying the enslavement of African people on the basis of a reading of black life and its spiritual geography as reducible to an inevitable, natural subservience to other races, a modern fable constructed upon and summed up in the idea of an everlasting social, spiritual, and genetic mark also known as ‘the curse of Ham.’

The first, missing “Chapter A” of Genesis, conforms with the polysemic economy seen above in the title by beginning with a continuation, “Then Noah said to his sons…”), which extends the plot and events of Book Seven, effectively deferring the salvation destined and recorded in book 8. In this context, the conflict performed by Shem and Japhet introduces the conflict of man against man, or polemos, into the ecology of the ark. The state of war between the sons of Noah as anthropological tableau, here casts the other Son of Noah, Ham, in a unique and mediating role upon the Ark, himself keeping up the prophetic tradition by interceding to “calm his two

---

* The beginning of history “reaches out to future historical outreach, especially by teaching what humankind does not wish to comprehend, in spite of all the immense hardness of history, does not want to understand something that perhaps only latter days will learn after reaching the nadir of destruction and devastation – that life need be understood not from the viewpoint of the day, of life merely accepted, but also from the view of strife, of the night, of polemos. The point of history is not what can be uprooted or shaken, but rather the openness to the shaking” (Patočka, Kohák and Dodd ++)

72
brothers…Who had eyes the size of figs and the colour of hot coals, [and who] looked at each other full of anger and contempt. The ark, however, floated on the waters of the abyss” (20).

Chapter B keeps step with the form and style of the experiment, increasing tensions and upping the ante toward a resolution of dramatic tension in which the position of Ham alone seems to foretell the prophetic intervention once again of Noah. In his father’s momentary absence, the conflict worsens and the two brothers come to blows. Noah, roused from his slumber upon the ark, is thus awakened again in the prophetic imagination and poetic bravado of the tale, the variation, and song (or might we say, zong!?):

23. Then the cries and shouts reached the ears of Noah, at the same time as his son Ham, who came to him crying: ‘My father, my father, if Cain will be avenged seven times, and Lameh seventy times seven, what will happen to Shem and Japheth?’

24. And when Noah asked him to explain what he had said Ham told him of the brothers’ disagreement, and the anger that spurned them, and said: ‘to quieten them.’ Noah Said: ‘Let us go.’

25. The ark, however, floated on the waters of the abyss.

Shem and Japhet’s wives lament their fate for their husband’s descent into madness as, again in Chapter C, the fellas cannot stop fighting over the propriety of the rivers and resources of the world to come.

Finally, the patriarch issues a command as the violence between the two brothers begins to erupt anew, drowning out the sound of Noah’s voice, “blood …began to flow
in great abundance” (23). At this point, the crescendo of sounds and voices wailing in cacophony of all fugitive life find themselves united in a chorus of prayer and apocalyptic fury as Noah issues an ultimate command and warning to the dwellers of the crimsoned ark:

23. ‘Now, therefore, I say unto you that, before the ark descends to earth, I want no agreements about the place where you will pitch your tents.’

24. Then he became pensive.

25. And lifting his eyes up to heaven, for the porthole in the deck was open, he shouted with a sad voice:

26. ‘They do not yet possess the earth and already they are fighting over frontiers. What will happen when it’s the turn of Turkey and Russia?’

27. And none of Noah’s sons could understand these words of their father… (Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis 26).

By now, the reader can probably guess how the last line ends the tale and completes the addendum: “28. The ark, however, still floated on the waters of the abyss” (26). Indeed, these may be taken as chapters of Genesis or not, but if we accept some of their claims we must accept the claim on their own authority of remaining as the title announces them chapters of Genesis that are still missing.

Machado’s opacity is self-illuminating here, but not only hermetic; although nothing at all has been altered or resolved by the intervention on the one hand, given that the entry both begins and ends within a narrative arc already prescribed, at the
same time, everything – and I mean everything – is different. And this time not even
Ham or “any of Noah’s sons” understood the meaning of the words revealed in the
missing chapters. So, the reader, left to ponder an ancient apocrypha or fable, given to
wonder about the meaning of the prophetic words, which can only be grasped in the
time of the reader’s discovery, is led to a dialectical image of the present shot through
with messianic time. For this is a myth and a history, which has now become from first
being a short story, a parable but of a very unusual type in that it does not reference
through allusion and metaphor, but rather breaks the frame of abstraction and directly
references an example entirely outside the narrative ark of the speaker. Machado’s
reference to Russia and Turkey, which were politically embroiled in the time of
Machado’s writing, had obviously not yet emerged from under cover of the deluge or
into subsequent world history. This sleight of hand that inserts anachronistic
contemporaneity breaks in from the narrative point of view of the posthumous, finding
a seam in the time of narration capable of eavesdropping on Noah’s private discourse in
prayers to heaven, offering the reader of Genesis time in the break of the original danger
of passage; reframing, through the disaster of history itself. The world outside of (and
generated by) the text thus becomes in the reading of “In the Ark” the very same abyss
whose immensity the work traverses.
John Gledson writes in the translator’s introduction to his collection of short stories by Machado de Assis, *A Chapter of Hats*, that the pieces he selected for translation “were written between 1878 and 1906, and first published, almost all of them, in magazines and newspapers of the time” (Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis 3). Gledson, however, disregards Machado’s “production before 1878,” an unfortunate trend in Machadian scholarship, because of the perception that “in tone and subject matter it can strike modern readers as naïve and limited,” due to the aged taste of romantic forms of Machado’s failure at the baroque; “as if there was a voice trying to find itself, and not quite succeeding - often it seems directed at the marriageable girls of the carioca elite, and to share their concerns” (Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis). Although it seems disgraceful from the critic’s perspective to have such an audience, one wonders not only what could be wrong with being marriageable or young, let alone Carioca – and as for the elite, this need not only mean the white and the wealthy – but why this audience’s tastes should prove exclusive. This dissertation’s essential argument is completely in accord with the opinion of Isaac Goldberg and other critics who suggest that Machado’s literary brilliance and maturity were in evidence throughout his life, not only beginning in the 1880s with the advent of the so-called “Machadian turning point” of *The Posthumous Memoirs*, as Roberto Schwarz has influentially opined. Operating within a similar assumption of periodicity whereby Machado’s masterworks become his first
works of international concern and universal value, Gledson claims that we already
“know [what] Machado wanted,” and that this was “to transcend” the “boundaries” of
local audience “and write, potentially, for the world. When he achieved his aim, it was
with a single bound - or two, first in a story, second in a novel,” which announced the
distinctive personal style of the author where “parody and irony became his lifeblood”
(4). He notes that in Machado’s

“famous essay of 1873, "The instinct for Nationality,’” he had written that: ‘What
should be demanded of the writer above all is a certain intimate feeling which
makes him a man of his time and country, even when he treats subjects remote in time
and space’ [italics in the original]. Five years later,” Gledson’s cliff notes continue,
“time and space all but disappear, and we are in Noah’s ark, ‘floating on the waters
of the abyss.’ “"In the Ark’ is a sardonic little counter-parable…” (3-4).

In an attempt to translate the peculiar form of the tale, Gledson invents his own
Machado, suddenly deracinated, a miniature of himself without roots or raisons d’etre,
insofar as the locality from which the narrator and author of “In the Ark” compose and
address their message has everything on God’s green Earth to do with Rio de Janeiro.
The year of its composition, 1878, as well as the intervening years between the selected
essay and this one of dozens of stories written in the interim - no doubt also matter in
the context of the story. "The name of dialectics says no more,” after all, “than that
objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder, that they come to
contradict the traditional norm of adequacy….It indicates the untruth of identity, the
fact that the concept does not exhaust the thing conceived (Adorno Aesthetic Theory :
Newly Translated, Edited, and with a Translator’s Introduction by Robert Hullot-Kentor 5). The remnant of Rio de Janeiro in the imaginaire of the ark would be an element in the tale the inclusion of which might cause the parable to seem less trifling and counter-active. It has everything to do with causing the present to appear: regeneration, not vanishing into the abyss of transcendent universality.

As if presenting evidence for his pejorative evaluation, Gledson appraises the “sardonic” and “little counter-parable” as “a kind of rewriting of the Garden of Eden myth, but without the paraphernalia of primeval innocence, original sin, serpents and female guile - male aggression, however, does make an appearance” (Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis 3). Actually, as we have clearly seen above, Machado’s surgical entrance into the discourse of origins was far more seamless and technically calculated than Gledson’s summary reflects. The confluence at the end of the final lost chapter between the prophetic and narrative voice and point of view is also a dramatic point of departure where “rewriting …of myth” and “counter-parable” enjoin their fugitive tryst.

When the narrator reports on Noah’s extrapolation from his son’s conflict a foreshadowing of the historico-political drama of the nation state (i.e., “Turkey and Russia” as emblems and specificities of such a condition) then the symbolic power of contemporary geopolitical identity becomes however indeterminately, associated with the names of Japhet and Shem. “In the Ark” thus articulates in its status as
archaeological find the revelation of genealogical precedents in the form of the tale and its protagonists which function henceforth as signs and ciphers, elements and sediments not only of a remote past. The embryonic nature of the ancient and the alien distances of its remove are brought into synchrony with the present time, which comes to share their nature as myth, origin, and genesis: however complete the historical record, scriptural understanding, or the manifest of the ark may be, all is for naught if not for the manner of their passage.

As if to exalt his fine work of translation by comparison, or else himself switching into the role of trickster figure, Gledson diverts attention from the complexity of Machado’s minima moralia, signposting a geography lesson. "Rio de Janeiro is far away [from] Turkey and Russia,” which were “bitter enemies throughout the nineteenth century” (Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis), he notes, as if to sum up the geopolitical savoir faire of Machado’s manifesto on the horizon of the now emerging only in relation to the specific and peculiar conditions of the abyss, of which Fanon spoke; weeping astride its reality, “straddling Nothingness and Infinity” (Fanon Black Skin, White Masks 108). Gledson, who claims to decipher the young Machado (or Machadinho)’s spiritual condition as if they had shared personal correspondence, yet can’t connect with anything he wrote before 1878, suggests, “[w]e know [what] Machado wanted.” And what would that be, pray tell? According to Gledson, Machado’s aspiration was “to
transcend these boundaries” of a local audience and predominately women’s readership “and write, potentially, for the world” (4). Why “potentially” for the world? The supplement to the text suggests that *Genesis* exceeds the narrative of *Genesis*.

Gledson suggests that Machado’s clearing of the horizon of local origins occurred with the appearance of this story and with the novel *The Posthumous Memoirs of Bras Cubas*: “it was with a single bound - or two, first in a story, second in a novel” (Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis 4). One wonders how Machado’s underground character, the “Moleque” of the *Illustrated Weekly* (*Semana Illustrada*), or his ironic sidekick, Dr. Semana, would lampoon in their satirical journal such a myopic and manicured view of Machado’s illustrious career. By the year 1867, when Machado was inducted by Dom Pedro II as a Knight in the Order of the Rose, a fraternal association created by the monarch, he had been publishing his own creative work in numerous genres for over a decade of frenzied activity.

The omission of Machado’s extensive contributions to *The Illustrated Week* from the systematic study of his work has resulted in a general underestimation of the quantity and quality of the literary production for which he was responsible during his lifetime. Literary and critical biographies of his genesis as a writer that dismiss Machado’s far-ranging publications in *The Illustrated Week* as part of a long phase of juvenilia end up tossing out the baby Machado with the bathwater, forfeiting the
dramatic works and translations, the songs and manifestoes (along with, his personal
touch on some six-thousand-plus pages of The Illustrated Week in its 15-year tenure) that
he wrote in his youth, laying the foundations for the acclaimed masterpieces to come.
Readings that omit from their methodologies a critical appreciation for Machado’s
visionary maturity from a young age are also likely to exempt from their methodologies
reference to the exemplary black youth from the community of Machado’s talented
peers his work addressed and exalted. Despite his unawareness of this collective
mediation, the extraordinary service rendered by his translations of Machado’s writings,
which are among the best available into English, demonstrate the readiness of everyone
who reads Machado to find more in posthumous personae. As in James Weldon
Johnson’s world-famous poem “The Creation: A Negro Sermon,” “Na Arca” or “In the
Ark,” inveighs in the midst of contemporary geopolitics with a cosmic message for
humanity. If “to be a work means: to set up a world” (Heidegger 43), Machado’s recit
sets a world afloat within the milieu of salvation which is located precisely within this
world where fiction and history, mythos and materia mutually are at stake.

Sons of Noah: The Black Press in Rio de Janeiro

Aside from the selective valences of the genre of archaeological revelation which
stories like “In the Ark,” “The Attendant’s Confession,” and “A Visit from Alcibiades”
play through and change, such stories which perform their thetic materiality in the form
of their meta-dramatic documentary status as evidences, remnants, and found objects, letters and historical records, also transmit local histories. As archaeological objects, resonating within the fields of semantic, poetic, and forensic register, entries in the catalogue of Machado’s fiction inveigh not only upon the eternal themes and theological abstractions – they grasp in their ecstatic sobriety at the present realities of everyday life against the backdrop of cosmic causes, action, and song.

There is an additional valence that must be carefully considered against Gledson’s historicist claim regarding Machado’s emergence, his breakthrough success, and the historical material contexts of the work’s production. These valences of the material history of the text are a social sediment registered and recorded as a signature accompanying Machado’s own which – ironically, and incidentally, he signed “Eleazar” in likely only this instance of the first publication of “In the Ark.” This fact would be easy to miss and perhaps unlikely for a translator’s introduction or even a biographical survey to mention, yet it bears directly upon both biography and translation as well as the themes of descent and inheritance ferried within the capacious notions of Noah’s person as archon and patriarch, librarian of life. Indeed, Machado ties the short story “In the Ark” into a genealogy of a personal history and a spiritual geography of the missing chapters of the genesis of the black press in Brazil and its role in the architecture, technology and artifice of a literary tradition that would become the first national
literature and not a breakthrough work or single flare of a meteoric talent, but a shower of radiant stars.

3.2 Myth as Secreted History: Blues People and the Black Press in Rio de Janeiro

They who would be admitted to no school and attend no academy other than that of their own invention, secreted from the blood sweat and tears of enjoyment and labor of love, would offer their nations and the world a literary apparatus unparalleled in world history. Machado’s first mentor, Francisco de Paula Brito, had much in common with the youth he chose to encourage and publish. Himself born to a family of freed persons, like Machado’s parents the first generation descended from manumitted African descendants, Paula Brito “was never able to go to school,” and was “taught to read and write” at home by “his sister Ana Angelina das Chagas” (Hallewell). Through his own ingenuity, Brito would develop “social contact with a wide range of intelligent friends [to] complete his education and give him enough mastery of Portuguese to become a minor poet in his own right, and sufficient French to act as a translator for Plancher by his late teens” (Hallewell 61).

By that time, Paula Brito was sufficiently proficient in French to translate for the most erudite and credentialed typographer in all of Brazil, himself an émigré from across the Atlantic: Pierre Plancher de la Noé, a fugitive printmaker who had brought his entire
Parisian printshop with him in transatlantic passage to Rio where he was ultimately accorded an official post and function in the affairs of government by being named Imperial Typographer and entrusted with discharging the publication of the Constitution of 1824. Francisco de Paula Brito served in the official capacity as Assistant to the Imperial Typographer in this historic venture, staying on in the service of his vanguard internship in print culture and letters until Plancher’s return to France. Soon, the political climate and the technical apparatus aligned with the auspices of a social consciousness stirring in the environs of the court that would combine to ignite the engine of a new Black Atlantic world of literary production, print culture, and fugitive communion.

As Ana Flávia Magalhães Pinto has observed, the emergence of the black literati of nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo can be best understood outside of the conditions of its immediate genesis. That is to say that the history of the black press in Brazil draws from the immanence of this ongoing literacy project of black resistance in which Ana Angelina das Chagas transmits to her brother a spark-like baton that will have already enabled her to access, contribute to and transmit a trans-national literature. In order for this Brazilian literature published by Paula Brito, written by Machado de Assis, Teixeira de Sousa, Castro Alves, Gonçalves Crespo, etc., to be born, in other words, its audience and artists are bequeathed in and by, and as a diaspora. Magalhães
Pinto’s claim that the black literati of the nineteenth century descends and emerges from prior generations of African diaspora social and cultural experience in Brazil extending back to the first outposts of fugitive slave communities or quilombos in Brazil.5

Seen too in this context of the extension of origins, Machado’s short story “In the Ark” “(re)writes the music” (Moten "In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition") of Brazilian genesis.

It is more than a record[…] in the way that record[…]s are; not merely …artifact[s], it transmits, through an improvisational writing, the music as a kind of abstraction directed toward ensemble. ["In the Ark"] is representation that moves in the absence of representation: not as any simple valorization of process—though such happens in the words—and not just in the ideology and metaphysics of spirit and nation (Moten "In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition" 118).

The location and locality in relation to the cosmic concerns of black letters conduct the uncanny resonances of their exorbitant (trans-)mission, un poco loco, but not missing. In the citation above from In the Break: Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition,

Fred Moten was discussing another work, the “Dark Lady of the Sonnets” by Amiri Baraka, an elegy for Billie Holiday, and yes, a kind of late letter. Black writing finds its

_____________________________

5 The frase published in a pamphlet by the Ilê Aiyê Pedagogy Coordination Project sums up the matter nicely: “Onde teve africano, teve quilombo no Brasil,”meaning: “Wherever there was an African, there was a quilombo, in Brazil.” - A Coordenação do Projeto de Extensão Pedagógica do Ilê Aiyê, pg 10. Or, after the poet, emcee, dj, and professor from Z’Africa Brazil, Gaspar has written: Brazil is a quilombo (Z’Africa). Does it follow then that the world is a ghetto?
chance encounter with opportunities given by the occasion of recording, the expression of documents and the dissemination of continuities. The historical operation of these figures and networks hidden in the missing chapters of African diaspora history requires that we attend to their passage and reveal them by the manner and the methods inherited to make visible the marks and read the works of the il/legible posthumous people:

The myth of the blues is dragged from people. Though some others make categories no one understands. A man told me Billie Holiday wasn’t singing the blues, and he knew. O.K., but what I ask myself is what had she seen to shape her singing so? What, in her life, proposed such tragedy, such final hopeless agony? (Amiri Baraka, “Dark Lady of the Sonnets” qtd in Moten, ibid).

The hidden figures and inner spirits of the black press form from its very first letters phantom extensions and ancestral antecedents that make historical claims intelligible, if not pressing, to our present; a chain of signifiers of which modern consciousness still finds itself entwined with the spiritual genealogy of a resistance prior to colonial consciousness and its ontologies of racial subjection. From the beginning of his training as a typographer introduced to the craft by the most qualified Brazilian native on the plates of iron and steel, diligently applying daily learning in the editing and printing of newspapers and journals, almanacs and dictionaries, translations and pamphlets and magazines.

It was thus, through exposure to the rhythms and mechanisms of journalism, that the cronista (chronicler), poet and literary critic, that we think of as the decorated
founder of the Brazilian Academy of Letters, Machado de Assis, emerged into literary form. He collaborated by diverse forms in periodicals like the *Marmorta Fluminense* – where he began his publishing career in 1855 with the poem “Ela,” dedicated to his late young sister – as well as the *Correio Mercantil* (1859); the *Diario do Rio de Janeiro* (1860), where Machado would ghost write for low pay (par for the negre litteraire course?); the *Gazeta de Notícias* (1888-1889); and the journal *O Espelho* – in which he debuted as a theater critic –; in the *Semana Illustrada* (1860-1876) and in the *Journal das familias*, where he primarily published short stories.

Among so many spaces Machado occupied, suffice it to say that *Posthumous Memoirs of Bras Cubas*, the novel distinguishing the career of this literary figure, was initially serialized in the journal *Revista Brasileira*, read by the young Carioca elite between March and December of 1880 (Magalhães Pinto 34). Paula Brito’s social vision shines through his mentorship of Machado to situate the young writer and orient his emerging publications in a lifeworld and discursive universe within which they are themselves the ark of their immediate salvation, their own prophetic and poetic interpolation into history and the architects of this extemporaneous super-psalmic, scriptural passage.

The social vision of collectivism that animated the genius of Brito’s entrepreneurial publishing career and his “major importance” as a figure of black letters
can also be seen carrying on the democratic infrastructure of a literate community championed by Plancher (de la Noé):

in his being the first publisher to bring out the work of contemporary Brazilian literary authors as a speculation, instead of as a straight business transaction on the writer’s commissions. For the very first time, a national poet or novelist could hope to achieve publication in book form and be paid for it. Indeed, Brito’s patriotic interest in Brazilian culture united with his own personal experience of poverty in a willingness to offer direct financial support to any impoverished young writer (Hallewell, 67).

Francisco de Paula Brito was about that black life – black youth, the African child, the immortal child; the valorization and education of women, the cultural wealth of community. Paula Brito defended the freedom of the press and advocated for the liberation of the enslaved by living a full life and using his whole mind; printing newspapers and journals that presented different and sometimes conflicting political orientations, inserting racial, spiritual, economic and literary concerns into the agenda of daily discussion, deliberation, and creative production.

One century after Machado’s birth, one of his notable biographers wrote that “When he died in 1908, Machado de Assis was of the same age, it is safe to say, as the national literature. He was born in June of 1839, that is, shortly before the end of the
If the posthumous evaluation of Machado’s literary life reveals a “literary life” so epic and compelling as to mirror the narrative arc of an entire nation, language, and people, over and across the shifting political and geographical landscape of many years, then the critical evaluations are also, by virtue of their modesty, understatement and subtlety reverent testaments to the power of that literary tradition’s influence upon the critic and the reader alike. An entire period of a national literature, the epoch of that people’s natal occasion reads as a field entirely surrounded by his signature.

Ana Flavia Magalhães Pinto, in a public talk filled to capacity at SESC Sao Paulo, in January, 2017, commenting on the obscurity to which the black literary community and press of nineteenth-century Brazil has been consigned, drew attention to this world-historical caesura as a mutable yet remarkable failure of public and social institutions on a massive scale. Frankly put, in her words, it was “a crime against the Brazilian people,” for the indigenous, endemic and immanent cultural and social realities of black life and African descent to articulate their differences within their own noble and regal milieu

---

6 “Quando morreu, em 1908, Machado de Assis tinha, a bem dizer, a idade da literatura nacional. Elle nasçera em junho de 1839, isto é, pouco antes de extincta a Regencia e proclamado o segundo Imperador.”
only to fall upon the deaf ears of a forgetful and prejudiced modernity forgetful of its origins, parables and counter-parables. Finding myself present in the room for an electrifying and informative survey of the vast intellectual terrain across innumerable fields of world-building aside from and in addition to the worlds of letters, on that occasion, my contribution to the dialogue could only corroborate.

I continue to feel, as I commented then, that it is in fact a crime against humanity, and one that reveals to us our poverty in the absence of these “missing chapters” of Machado, of Genesis, and of the Atlantic World. That the community of these forgotten and resented – misrepresented – readers and writers of nineteenth-century Brazilian intellectual and professional, civic and governmental, publishing and literary, medical and legal, architectural and military fame have been silenced, submerged, and forgotten is remediable, even if the reasons that such omissions persist is a part of life “in the arc” with Machado. I forward that this is a crime against humanity of baffling, tragic, and epigenetic proportions and that it folds back upon itself, upon a prior time, a previous chapter in the history of Genesis.

In the social clubs headquartered at the printshops and typographies of Francisco de Paula Brito, in this network of new world literary architecture and imagination, music was a constant companion and resource. Machado de Assis has five documented compositions attributed to the phase of his participation in the Petalological Society;
"Patriotic Hymn," which was an enthusiastically celebrated national anthem composed before the officially recognized anthem accompanied with music by Júlio José Nunes, dated 1863. It was once presented by the actress Emília Adelaide, at the Gymnasium Theater, with the title "Hymn of the Volunteers". Secondly, the "Cantata of Arcadia", with music by José Amat was written especially for the literary and artistic salons, commissioned by the Arcádia Fluminense, at the Fluminense Club halls on November 25, 1865. The third was "Night Moon", a musical poem with arrangement by Arthur Napoleão, a serenade for singing, piano and flute. "Tears of Wax" and "Sad Heart" were also musically accompanied poems Machado wrote in the early 1860s.

Paula Brito was also a famed contributor to the musicality of environs, and the author of the lyrics of the famous "Lundu da Marrequinha" (Rio de Janeiro, Tipografia Paula Brito, 1863), with music by Francisco Manuel da Silva (author of the Brazilian National Anthem), the lyrics of another lundu, "Ponto final", with music by José Joaquim Goiano. Paula Brito had the merit of hosting memorable encounters between musicians and literate poets, contributing to the propagation of the first Brazilian genres, and the lundu. Musical poems: "Lundu da marrequinha", (with Francisco Manuel da Silva), 1863, "Ponto final", lundu, (with José Joaquim Goiano), s.d., among others, were well-known to Cariocas of the mid-nineteenth century. Paula Brito announced himself as a poet on the scene with his publication in 1859 of a collection of poems titled *Anonymas*,
as well as some fables by Lachambeaudie which he translated “com muita graça e propriedade,” published in the *Marmota*. Paula Brito made original translation and arrangement of all of Aesop’s fables as well.

To punctuate this impressive litany with an attempt at a more thorough overview of Paula Brito’s absolutely stunning prolific achievement as artificer of letters and archon of the Black Press, one could do no better than to refer to the rigorous study by Hallewell available in both English and translated into Portuguese:

Eunice Ribeiro Gondim records 372 non-periodical publications by Paula Brito, of which 83 editions are medicine. The bulk of these medical works were in fact theses: if we deduct them, and other such works we may presume to have been printed on commission (political speeches, funeral orations, constitutions of benevolent societies, theatre announcements, company reports and occasional poems), and pamphlets of under twenty pages, we are left with 214 editions, of which the largest group (100 exactly) is drama. Two thirds of this drama are opera librettos, a fair reflection of the range for opera in mid-nineteenth century Brazil. Thirteen were editions of Brazilian originals, but the majority were, as we might expect, translations from the Italian, including ten Donizettis, eight Verdis, five Puccinis and three each from Belini and Rossini (66)... Other foreign authors he published, mostly in his own translations, included Frederic Soulie, Scribe, Pitre Chevalier, Dumas *pere*, Jules David, Critineau Joly and Emile Souvestre, but these usually appeared in his periodicals rather than as separate books (Hallewell, 66).

Celebrating the self-affirmative declaration of the presence of the black Brazilian writer in the flesh and on the page with *Homem de Cor / O Mulatto* (1833), the first literary publication in the Portuguese language, with the clarion object to proclaim the black person as free and present an autonomous world citizen to the new world stage.

Emphatically normalizing the articulation of black identity and social formations,
Paula Brito and the coterie of his hidden figures of Brazilian literary genesis gathered not just the nation’s future, but the whole world in his block chapel. How did they experience, imagine, and reshape the cosmos?

3.3 Naughtobiography: Posthumous Writing of a Literary Life

Susan Sontag writes that the novel that gained Machado his stripes as Brazil’s greatest literary artist, which John Gledson had referred to above, *The Posthumous Memoirs of Bras Cubas*, is the ultimate fulfillment of the genre of the “imaginary autobiography.” Machado, in constructing this spectral body (“without organs”?), borrowed from the structure and content of Chateaubriand’s memoir, draws the ontic enframement of the ‘imagined life’ within *Weltanschauung* of the ghostly. More French than the Frenchman, and by the same token, still more dead, Machado’s imaginary autobiography reworks Chateaubriand’s confessional from an event to an immanence, from a living author dying to become writing, to a dead author whose only proof of having lived is a book he must have entrusted others to publish.

Lifting from *Memoirs d’Outre Tombe* the idea of an aesthetic commodification of experience for presentation against the backdrop of death which would coincide with the “complete history,” the total memoir, Machado reads Chateaubriand’s personal...
narrative as he does that of Bras Cubas; a fiction. In one instance, asking of himself an aestheticized object mediated by the commercialization of his absence (his presence turned book), Chateaubriand, compares himself negatively to the charlatan Tartuffe, from the play by Molière, Machado uses the figure of Bras Cubas to comment upon the indulgence and self-aggrandizement in which the “memoir” commemorates its author, commending his soul as a history for the world. Chateaubriand writes:

I do not visit prisoners, like Tartuffe, to distribute alms among them, but to enrich my mind among men more worthy than myself. Though their opinions may differ from mine, I fear nothing: a convinced Christian, all the fine geniuses on earth could not weaken my faith; I pity them, and my charity protects me from seduction (Chateaubriand and Baldick).

Bras Cubas narrates a personal experience of delirium in his consciousness whereby he is transformed into a book (“Aquinas’ Summa Theologica, to be exact), returned to human form only to find himself transported “to the origin of the centuries” on the back of a hippopotamus (Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas 16), face to face in a horrible confrontation with “Pandora,” who
announces herself to him as “your mother and your enemy” (17).\footnote{“Don’t be frightened, she said, ‘my enmity doesn’t kill, it’s confirmed most of all by life. You’re alive: that’s the only torment I want.”
“I’m alive?” I asked, digging my nails into my hands as if to certify my existence.
“Yes work, you’re alive….Right now while you’re going crazy, you’re alive, and if your consciousness gets an instant of wisdom, you’ll say you want to live” (17).}

The conjuration of Bras Cubas’ delirium continues to devour him despite his protestations:

“…nor do I want to understand you. You’re an absurdity, a fable…. The Nature I know is only mother and not enemy. She doesn’t make life a torment, nor does she, like you, carry a face that’s as indifferent as the tomb. And why Pandora?”

“Because I carry good and evil in my gab and the greatest thing of all, hope, the consolation of mankind. Are you trembling?”

“Yes, your gaze bewitches me.”

“I should think so. I’m not only life, I’m also death, and you’re about to give me back what I loaned you. You great lascivious man, the vuluptuosity of nothingness awaits you.”

When that word, “nothingness,” echoed like a thunderclap in that huge valley, it was like the last sound that would reach my ears. I seemed to feel my own sudden decomposition (Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas 17-8).
Comparing Bras Cubas, who hides the extraordinary process of his graphic labor, or whose “intensive monographic work” (Du Bois) is hidden, as is the world its provenance, with the narrator of Chateaubriand’s Memoirs, we find the levity of a fictional person to be more impressive than the presentation of a confessional subject of real history whose conceit to ownership seems extraneous to the writing itself.

If Chateaubriand felt himself a beast of burden for the labor of writing about dying, Machado may have disdained aspects of this attitude, the eschatological limits of whose “Christian” values of salvation Machado evaluates and revalues through a nonthetic analysis of this spirit of the times (Zeitgeist) from the point of view and within the social context of the conditions of chattel slavery socializing the cogito of Rio de Janeiro, the Brazilian experience, and the history of the Atlantic moment. As if to remark from the outset the gulf separating the memoirs of Bras Cubas’ from those of Chateaubriand, the “posthumous narrator” explores the limits of authorial voice and the apparatuses of authorship. In the preface to his Memoirs d’Outre Tombe the dying writer exhibits his

\[\text{http://tkline.pgcc.net/PITBR/Chateaubriand/ChateaubriandMemoirsBookXLII.htm#_Toc158627768}\]

\[8(“Will this work inspired by my ashes and destined for my ashes survive me? It may be that my work is bad; it may be that these Memoirs will fade in the light of day…..? What delightful shadows could one glimpse in the future? Fie on the clouds now hovering above my head!”)\]
comprehension of the requirements of literary form of the autobiographical text, however imaginary or posthumous. Chateaubriand thus emphasizing his act of literature in the work of non-fiction, takes up the problem posed by the generic requirements of memoir to recall the immemorial occasion of natality:

As it is impossible for me to foresee the moment of my death; as, at my age, the days granted to man are only days of grace, or rather of hardship, I intend, for fear of being taken by surprise, to explain the nature of a work destined to beguile for me the boredom of these last lonely hours, that no one wants, and that one does not know how to employ. The *Mémoires*, at whose head this preface is placed, embrace or will embrace the entire course of my life: they were begun in the year 1811, and have been continued down to today [Paris, 1st December 1833].

The narrator thus continues, in this “testamentary preface,” to summarize and preview a picaresque narrative of fantastically world-historical experiences in a litany of effusive detail:

I have met almost all the men who have played a large or small role, both abroad and in my own country, from Washington to Napoleon, from Louis XVIII to Czar Alexander, … I have explored the seas of the Old World and the New, and trodden the soil of the four quarters of the Earth. Having camped in the cabins of Iroquois, and beneath the tents of Arabs, in the wigwams of Hurons, …. I have sat… at the table of kings…. I have had dealings with a host of famous celebrities in the military, the Church, politics, the judiciary, the arts and sciences. I possess an immense mass of material …. I have signed treaties, …. I have been made privy to party secrets,…. I have viewed closely the rarest disasters …. I have been present at sieges …. I have made history, and been able to write it ….I have exerted upon it a triple influence, religious, political and literary.

Here it is as though Chateaubriand is the true object of Gates’ description of the best slave narratives insofar as they succeed in proving that they are, at least in successfully advancing a persuasive case for the fact that they may well be, human.
Chateaubriand, as the narrator or literary persona rendered by his *Memoirs*, himself bears a striking resemblance to a series of characters whose tragi-comic personalities, fates and roles in the narratives they star in are guided by the light of false philosophies, fraudulent ideas, and hypocritical religious pretensions. By the end of *Dom Casmurro*, apart from the monastic seclusion and prudish aloofness which isolate the aged narrator in the dark tower of his manic ruminations and jolting studies, there is nothing priestly about him. Bras Cubas testifies in early chapters to the extent of his deviant enjoyment of power:

> For example, one day I split open the head of a slave because she’d refused to give me a spoonful of cocoanut confection she was making and, not content with that evil deed, I threw a handful of ashes into the bowl, and not satisfied with that mischief, I ran to tell my mother she was the one who’d ruined the dish out of spite. And I was only six years old (*The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas* 25).

Bras Cubas continues to evidence his uncanny relationship with the commodity status of the enslaved black body as he narrates the story typical of his childhood games. Prudencio “was a black houseboy” whom Cubas recalled mounting as a toy horse:

> He’d get down on his hands and knees, take a cord in his mouth as a bridle, and I’d climb onto his back with a switch in my hand. I would whip him, make him

---

9 In Hartman’s work on the terrors of slavery and the formation of subjectivities under the duress of these extremely violent social conditions she notes that the “figurative capacities of blackness and the fungibility of the commodity are directly linked” (S. Hartman 26)
do a thousand turns, left and right, and he would obey – sometimes moaning – but he would obey without saying a word or, at most, an ‘Ouch, little master!’ – to which I would retort, ‘Shut your mouth, animal!’ (25).

In recounting these memories Cubas “also took a liking to the contemplation of human injustice” (25). If this is humorous, it is not only because of the dark absurdity of the hypocrisy or the bad faith of the central character. The injustice that Bras Cubas fails to comprehend, we must – or at least we are invited to – yet this is a glimmer of the extent of Machado’s boundless hospitality which we will explore in what follows as far as we can fathom. Prudencio’s name again arises in the text of Posthumous Memoirs in two instances.

Once, in the context of fungible capital as the surviving landholders, the heirs of the Cubas estate prepare to divvy up the legacy (including ostensibly the plantation-style mansion and its assorted effects) they become embroiled in a heated discussion of the resale value of the house. Prudencio is presented among those items listed among the family holdings with a cruelty and barbarity that Cubas shows no signs of identifying within himself. In the conversation among the three parties, Cubas’ sister announces that “Prudencio is free…[s]ince two years ago”: “Free? How could your father have managed things here without telling anyone? That’s great! What about the silver?...I don’t imagine he freed the silver, did he” (78-9)? The association of black life with cold hard cash, of Prudencio with the economic capital of the family’s assets, also demonstrates more broadly a general relation of dominance entrenched in a slave
society “in which slaves become the property of all whites, given their status in civil 
society” (Hartman, 29). Even though Prudencio is “free,” this condition is seen to have 
been instituted by the late Cubas’ act of manumission, he has not achieved liberation, he 
has merely been “freed.” The substance of this legacy transmitted to Prudencio, Bras 
Cubas’ “other/self,” whose own humanity had been identified as fungible capital and 
bodily enjoyment, the very foundation of the Atlantic world’s system of exchange 
constitutive of the symbolic, economic, and cultural capital of the Brazilian nation, thus 
raises a question about the resistance of the object at a time in history when the subject 
itself seems to feel itself haunted by the spectral charge of its negation.

Chateaubriand gives rise to a set of questions that both appear to Machado’s 
concerns and articulate the type of privilege giving rise to the crisis that Chatreabriand 
identifies and Machado feels to merit further commentary:

When will society disappear? What accidents will suspend its movements? 
In Rome, the reign of man replaced the reign of law: the Romans passed from 
republic to empire; our revolution is fulfilling itself in a contrary direction: we are 
ready to pass from monarchy to republic, or not to specify the exact form, to 
democracy; it will not be achieved without problems. ...will property, for 
example, remain distributed as it is? ....Can a political situation exist in which 
some individuals have an income of millions, while others die of hunger, when 
religion is no longer there with its other-worldly hopes to justify the sacrifice? ... 
The excessive disproportion of wealth and living conditions was accepted while it 
was implicit; but as soon as that disproportion was generally perceived, the old 
order received its death-blow. Recreate the aristocratic fictions if you can; try to 
convince the poor, when they have been taught to read and no longer believe, once 
they are as well-educated as you, try to persuade them then that they must submit
to every kind of privation, while their neighbors possess a thousand time their needs: as a last recourse you will have to kill them (Chateaubriand and Baldick).

Machado’s impatience with Chateaubriand seems to be evident in the very exaggerated caprice and brutal folly to which Bras Cubas is given – a characterological deconstruction of the specter of Memoirs d’Outre Tombe. Schwarz argues, Posthumous Memoirs was “the first world-class Brazilian novel,” reappropriating the word historical stage of Chateaubriand’s European empire, going the way of the Roman, epitomized in the final whimper and last analysis of Bras Cubas from the afterlife:

The principal [event of the book] was the invention of the Brás Cubas Poultice, which died with me because of the illness I’d contracted. Divine poultice, you would have given me first place among men above science and wealth because you were the genuine and direct inspiration of heaven. Fate determined the contrary. And so, all of you must remain eternally hypochondriac. This last chapter is all about negatives. I didn’t attain the fame of the poultice, I wasn’t a minister, I wasn’t a caliph, I didn’t get to know marriage. ….Putting one and another thing together, any person will probably imagine that there was neither a lack nor a surfeit and, consequently, that I went off squared with life. And he imagines wrong. Because on arriving at this other side of the mystery I found myself with a small balance, which is the final negative in this chapter of negatives—I had no children, I haven’t transmitted the legacy of our misery to any creature (Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas 220).

Long before the anti-intellectual trend in the academic perception of Machado in the United States and English language criticism of ignoring Machado’s early work,

Isaac Goldberg had written in his introduction to Brazilian Tales, in which a number of Machado’s stories receive excellent translation,
All of Machado de Assis is practically present in his early works; in fact, he did not change, he scarcely developed. He is the most individual, the most personal, the most ‘himself’ of our writers; all the germs of this individuality that was to attain in *Braz Cubas*, in *Quincas Borbas*, in the *Papeis Avulsos* and in *Varias Historias* its maximum of virtuosity, may be discovered in his first poems and in his earliest tales (Albuquerque, Machado de and Goldberg 31).

Yet, perhaps Goldberg goes too far, not in praise, but in appealing to the sentimental reading of Machado, which perceives his “origins” as a limitation overcome in the process of becoming a successful author, whereas, in fact, the “wretched of the earth” were precisely his *alma mater*, and *pater*. Goldberg writes with a sort of pity, projecting through lack of information on black literacy in Brazil, a maudlin shadow over the black literari and Afro-Brazilian cultural renaissances of quilombo and carnival, terreiro and towns, bursting with literacies and sciences, medicines and sciences unknown to casual observers from far away places like the twenty-first century.

### 3.4 The Trace of Valongo or, the Scent of ‘the Long Valley’: An Afrosonic Archeology of Arche-writing in Rio de Janeiro

“In order to understand the reality of slavery,” says Tânia Andrade Lima, archaeologist of the National Museum of Rio and project manager for the study of slavery at the wharf of Valongo. “It is necessary to trespass archives, unearth the past and submit material evidence to analysis in the laboratories. It is necessary to overcome mere documentary historiography or the economistic vision which only views slavery
from the point of view of the modes of production. Slavery needs to be materialized” (Haag). From these comments, it would seem Lima was stating the definition or describing the apparatus of black writing – the deconstruction of history, the decomposition of (its) literature. Valongo, “the port through which, between 1811 and 1831, one million Africans passed” into Brazil (Haag) has become in recent years an arche-writing of black life in testament to the way in which “the history and culture of different societies [that] have been skewed in Western interpretations [often] does not become apparent until long after the events [have transpired], when some silences are broken” (Mohammed 35).

Archeological research in Rio de Janeiro has only just begun. Yet combined with the ethnography, anthropology, the historicity of black experience of Brazil is coming more clearly into view. With a little help from Machado’s own specular writing of the Brazilian nation, we may bring such archeological digs into conversation with literary criticism, and DuBois’ blueprints and black impressions of the book to come. For nearly all of Machado’s fictional worlds have as their setting and scene nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro, and resonate out with the tonality of his distinctive literary style.

Fanon wrote that “it is necessary to become a child again in order to grasp certain psychic realities. This is where Jung was an innovator: He wanted to go back to the childhood of the world, but he made a remarkable mistake: He went back only to the
childhood of Europe” (Fanon, 190). It is notable that the story “Father against Mother,” published in 1906, only two years before the writer’s death, pertains specifically to the racial stratification of the Brazilian nation by the institution of slavery in a way that features the problem of black personhood for history and the problem of historiography for black natality. In the story, Machado mentions the Valongo which he chose to draw explicit attention to a site in the cultural history and collective memory of the city of Rio de Janeiro that had by that time been long forgotten and officially consigned to the silent memory of slavery’s recent past, detailing the apparatuses of nineteenth-century slavery in the city, indexing various tools of the trade of capturing, imprisoning, and hunting fugitive slaves.

In a recent study documenting current “findings” made by archeologists “discovering” evidence of a mass graveyard below one of Rio’s historic cultural centers, there is an uncanny amount of information being unearthed about African childhoods in nineteenth-century Brazil. Haag notes:

Approximately 780,000 children were brought as slaves to Brazil from the mid-nineteenth century, as they were more “docile” than adults and coped better in the crossings. In the height of the traffic, especially in Rio, one in three children were slaves….. New excavations in the cemetery corroborate this practice by the presence of skulls and arcades of youth.

By the time Machado published his late, master work, often considered the best of his short stories (or “contos), “Father Versus Mother,” the slave market that had once been the main drag for carioca fanfare had fallen into oblivion, not to be rediscovered
until 1996 during a renovation of a residential home, when workers opened the foundation to find thousands of teeth and fragments of human bones (Haag).

“The Valongo was part of the project of “national civilization,” intensified with the transformation of Rio in the seat of the Empire. But the result was [ostensibly] a paradox: a “European” Court with multitudes of blacks loose in the street. It was thought that the solution would be to use slaves to build up the city for the king. This movement, however, increased the demand for more slaves and even the construction of the Valongo complex in a remote quarter of the city by order of the viceroy soon (Haag) “attracted the population and the location became one of the busiest of Rio where, including the dock, the Valongo housed 50 meat markets or “butcheries” where the newly arrived blacks were auctioned.

A primal scene emerges from these accounts as a node in a network such that the Valongo or “Long Valley” shows up as a commonplace for the exemplarity and documentary evidence it articulates of the types of erasure and resounding of archives within which black writing surfaces. For the vast proportions of the Brazilian slave trade as it was experienced throughout nearly the entirety of the nineteenth century were not merely to be observed by Brazilians. In the account of Ildefonso Perreda Valdés, translated from the Spanish in the early twentieth century, the “Vallongo was the slave market” where slave ships arrived “from the African coasts … loaded with
human merchandise ... bought on the coast for a few ‘missanges’ or glass beads, and branded with the ‘carimbo,’ the indelible seal of slavery” (314). Then, “made into living corpses” en route of an unspeakably brutal middle passage, they “disembarked and passed through the customs house ....This merchandise, [“nothing but skin and bones] would be marched off to the market-places and put at the disposal of the buyers. There was a poster which said, “Fine Negroes, young and strong. Just arrived. Reasonable prices” (Cunard and Ford 314). One of the most sardonic and trenchant critiques in the box popular of Brazilian cultural discourse might be said to be the phrase that became a notable and celebrated exploration of the legacy of African chattel slavery practiced in Brazil. The story (inspired by Machado’s “Father Versus Mother”) and film is called “Quanto Vale ou é Por Quilo” and in its title and phrase it is a deconstruction, critique and explication of capitalism under the sign of slavery – also a teachable moment in vernacular Afro-brazilian Portuguese, though no particular slang is involved here: it’s just Latin to me. How much (does it cost, or is it worth, is its value, etc.) or is it (sold) by (weight, kilo, pound, etc).

The question, the theme, also treated as such by legendary rap group Racionais MCs in their recent Cores e Valores on a song sung by Mano Brown “Quanto Vale O
Show?" ("How much does the concert cost?" / "What’s the value of the performance?")

Mano Brown raps about the vocation of “this” hip hop thing that he’s doing right then in the song. Brands; risks; stolen life; ghetto dreams; are they worth their weight in blood, sweat, and tears – gold? What is the universal currency if, as Machado writes in “Father versus Mother,” “money hurts too” (Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis)?

At the outset of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, most of the captive Africans who were unloaded like damaged goods and forcibly disembarked to their graves or captivity in the city of Rio de Janeiro were abducted from Bantu-speaking regions of Africa--Congo and Angola--and the vast majority of them children. Sao Paulo, where Mano Brown raps about his childhood growing up in the 1970s and 80s to form Brazil’s most renowned hip hop group, Racionais MCs. Not standing outside the historical and geographical, cultural and sociolinguistic space of those African children and their survival, their descendants, and their antigonic claim, but “born like this, from this, into this” (DOOM), Mano Brown interrogates the economy of the milieu within which his

10 “Weak and skinny invisible boy on the block / I planned the suicide of my own sick mind, hey! / Without a father or family but not alone among the beasts / Bad men done bad things in their miseries / My cousin resolved to keep gats and revolvers / Another round revolts, surrounds itself easy / All was war with the favela beneath / No books, no pens, and Brazil in collapse / What’s the value? / What’s it worth? / What’s the price? / How much to see the show?”
notable and unlikely n/autobiography takes place. Do you know what it’s like to be a currency? How do you evaluate worth and assign value to experience, to life, to survival, to integrity, to body and soul?

What kind of ill-logic of history makes “prices” for children “reasonable?” Less reasonable still, it seems, the “long valley” has today been officially conceived and culturally reintroduced to Brazil as the “Porto Maravilha” (“Marvelous Port”), repeating the erasure that had compacted the ground through so much stamping, beating, and burning of the bodies of the “new blacks” into the very “humus” of the earth:

The first meat market which we entered contained 300 children. The oldest of them could have been no more than 12 years old and the youngest, no more than 6. The poor things were squatting in a warehouse. The smell and the heat of the room were disgusting. The thermometer indicated 33 °C and it was winter!” wrote Englishman Charles Brand in 1822. After 60 days aboard a “tumbeiro,” the Africans, exhausted and sick, had yet to face the lack of food, clothing and shelter. A place to bury so many dead became a necessity and such was created in the proximity of the “Cemetery of New Blacks.” “Without coffin and without the slightest piece of clothing they are thrown into a pit that is not two feet deep. The dead are taken and thrown in a hole like a dead dog, some soil is put on top and if any part of the body is discovered, it is pounded with tree stumps to form a porridge of earth, blood and excrement,” described the traveler Carl Seidler in 1834. The place, however, obeyed the logic and rules that engendered the complex: “The slaves that are not sold will not leave the Valongo or dead or alive.

The ‘scene of the crime’ was officially “hidden” in 1843, when it was repaved with 60 centimeters of concrete and was transformed into the Dock of the Emperor, site of the reception for Teresa Cristina, the future wife of Don Pedro II to serve as a symbolic and material emphasis of the erasure of the stains of slavery’s past (Haag).
Only since 2009 has the site become “reopened” since this enclosure over 150 years ago, and over a century since Machado’s mention of the former mass grave and slave market, which had become the location of a public works project in the mid-nineteenth century.

Exposed to the elements and quite abandoned apart from dumbfounded tourists and scurrying anthropologists daily pouring over “piles of personal objects and rituals of the so-called ‘new blacks,’ recently arrived captives from Africa,” the entire region in which the private residence turned dig site, then promises to be redolent with the types of objects found buried beside and on the decomposed bodies of the fallen abductees, outliving their hair and fingers, but reminding of these and mouths and necks, eyes and ears which would no longer be adorned by but mixed with gems and stones, “beads, cowries, pipes, amulets of the Islamic ‘crescent moon,’ ceremonial jewelry and even “stones for the seating of orixas” (Haag). Yet for all this sophisticated scientific intervention, and quite a good bit of archaeological looting of the tombs of African holocaust while sweeping under the carpet the bodies and lives, the appropriations and lies upon which the empire of Brazil resides, the human, social, and spiritual cost of these transactions seem – it must be frankly stated – unsound and unreasonable. The logic of equivalence and the Faustian economics it sets for the social operations of modernity haunt the present with a foreboding question and problem of history: the
remainder as dangerous supplement. What is to be done with all of these remains? All these ones and zeroes? Look at these posthumous people: where do they all belong?

The size of the mass grave is unknown but archaeologists are skeptical that from reports from the time that describe it as something like the size of a soccer field are low estimates relative to the ostensible perameters and volume of its contents, having been, repeatedly, “entirely filled, it was reopened and the remains were burned and destroyed to make room for new bodies. Archaeologists also found mixed amongst the bones random urban waste: food, glass, building material, dead animals, and other detritus from an oblivious civilization.

Excavations show that everyday waste was thrown in with the bodies as the convention of its daily operation: this was not a grave, it was a landfill! Research has also shown that the vast majority of the discarded persons were Bantu, the ethnic group whose bodies “crowd the cemetery.” For the Bantu, impropper burial makes it impossible for the meeting between the dead and their ancestors, in the core their ethnic belief. One can imagine these felt doomed to a 'second death', aware that their memory would be erased in this final resting place,” notes Júlio César. The living, however, had no great chances: only one third of young blacks survived in slavery for more than 16 years (Haag).
Perhaps the translation of the name of the Porto Maravilha project should be made to reflect more of the bitter irony of the revitalization of the old slave market and mass grave in the portside area of Rio de Janeiro initiated in 2009 in anticipation of the 2016 Olympic games, in view of Machado’s own predilection for satire, and call it Port(ent) of Wonders. There is no mention of anything of the Valongo in the major works of Machadian literary criticism, not even in the definitive and recent Brazilian works in Portuguese specifically treating Machado’s relationship to the city of Rio de Janeiro. In the century since his passing, Brazilian letters and Machadian studies have been Playing in the Dark.

What other proof (if such a thing as evidence were needed in this “case”) would be necessary of the black historicity of Machado’s experience than the evidence of such preponderating efforts to ignore his blackness and deracinate his concerns for the world from the vantage point of the city of his birth? The native, who is unable to inhabit the world from which he is excluded sounds out and finds out both the totality of the colonial world and the implausibility of its totalizing force, posing a “challenge to the colonial world” that is “not a rational confrontation of points of view,” nor “a treatise on the universal, but the untidy affirmation of an original idea propounded as an absolute” (Fanon The Wretched of the Earth 41). The hauntology of the slave is the ontology of the abyss; the ecological communication of posthumous social life, contradicted and
interdicted by the catastrophe of “history,” sounding out from the book to come. What DuBois sought, and produced out of the tomb of that book to come is both revealed and abandoned by the same movement that ran through his time, and is figured in the expropriative arche-writing lost and found, and lost again, at the primal scene of the long valley of the Port(ent) of Wonders.

A history sacrificed to the thetic experience of nation sought by an illiterate people who accept their slavery and subjugation as those awaiting the arrival of the 2016 Olympics. It is time that this case has been declared the genocide that it is, not only as the site of an African holocaust, but, from the point of view opened up by the posthumous performance of those buried in the bowels of the Long Valley, we find the entire city a massive, unkempt graveyard with archaeological revelations untold. To borrow a phrase from the title of an autobiographical work by Lima Barreto, written during the writer’s stay at the National Hospice in the winter of 1919, Rio de Janeiro:

“cemetery of the living” (Barreto 9)!

Dying means: you are dead already, in an immemorial past, by a death that was not your own, which you have thus neither known nor lived, but under the threat of which you believe you are called to live; you await it henceforth in the future, constructing a future to make it possible at last, possible as something that will take place and will belong to the realm of experience. To write is no longer to put in the future a death always already past, but to accept that one must endure it without making it present and without making oneself present to it; it is to know that death has already taken place even though it has not been experienced, and to recognize in it the forgetting that it leaves, whose traces, which can be erased, call upon one to except oneself from the cosmic order, where disaster makes the real
impossible and desire undesirable. This uncertain death, always anterior, the attestation to a past without present, is never individual, just as it overflows the whole.

By speaking of a death that in order to be irreplaceable and because it is unique, is not even individual – “never individual,” he says – Blanchot puts forward a statement that would appear troublesome even to ... [Heidegger’s essential characterization of] a Dasein that announces itself to itself in its own being-for-death (Blanchot, Rottenberg and Derrida 51).

Machado’s own oeuvre resounds with a reading in the cipher of death the affirmation and difference of life reflecting back on the properties of the posthumous. In the novel *Philosopher or Dog*, through the narrative voice of the philosopher, Quincas Borba, he makes a formulation that may have particular salience here:

There is no death. The encounter of two expansions, or the expansion of two forms may determine the suppression of one of them; but, actually, there’s no death; there’s life, because the suppression of one is conditional upon the other’s survival, and the destruction does not reach the universal and common principle (Machado de and Wilson 11).

And if there is no death, then it follows that the living can only be themselves as they who pass from life (to life). Terraforming the world’s disastrous upset, the least of these and last to be salvaged, signs and tokens of a missing chapter of the genesis of the Atlantic world remind me of the ascent and full circle of the melodic line that concludes The Platters’s version of “Smoke Gets in Your Eyes.” At the arrangement’s end, where the song’s title is sung in a phrase in which each word is sung in a rising major scale, an octave is produced, resolving the harmonics of the composition one register higher. The higher the notes in the s(c)ale climb, the higher that smoke rises, as up from a fire, to meet the witnessing or shuttered eye; up from the horizon as smoke signals the presence
of flame. The song’s capacious metaphor suggests, if nothing else, that for a black reader like Machado, love caused reflection and partook in the motivations of inscription. The smokescreen of official silencing and forensic erasure did little to hide the condemning stench whose environmental toxicity matched an infernal dust of spiritual devastation. Posthumous people, in the sociality of a speculative fellowship with the dead, inherit an orientation from an ancient memory and enduring lesson of a message in the hold of that shelter and precarity, the spiritual undertaking of a historicity beyond history.

Lights of the world’s night, constellating the uprising world as a reach into the abyss, shine through the most resolute negation as the brilliance of black life. Black writing, the history of black peoples, and black life converge, then, in the movement posthumous persona(r)e of sinuey tissues where “bone is an alternate bell” (N. Mackey 50), ringing out the extimacy of flesh and stone, blood and iron, with the oceanic waves of the abyss; the stellar regions of spirit’s breath. The chorus of posthumous galleries rising in octave and unison from the remembering ground of their restless maiden

voyage. In the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., “Only when it is dark enough can you see the stars.”
4. Chapter 3: Smoking Mirrors, or Machado’s Masques and Noms de Plume

I am the Smoke King
I am black!
I am swinging in the sky,
I am wringing worlds awry;
I am the thought of the throbbing mills,
I am the soul of the soul-toil kills,
Wraith of the ripple of trading rills;
Up I’m curling from the sod,
I am whirling home to God;
I am the Smoke King
I am black.

- W. E. B. Du Bois, “Song of the Smoke”¹

Life’s contrasts are works of the imagination right next to you.
- Machado de Assis

Figure 2: “My father bleeds history” Table of Contents page from Maus by Art Spiegelman (Spiegelman)

J. Galante Sousa (1955) notes eighteen pseudonyms employed by Machado de Assis over the course of his career, giving detailed dates and locations of publication. The litany, drawing an arc across a spectrum of mid-nineteenth century Fluminense African American literary and print culture in a wide range of periodicals from the 1850s to the 1880s, makes this sesquipedalian train of monikers itself an impressive playlist and sample of Machado’s range and quality as a writer inter and intra alia: “As.; M.-as.; M.A.; M. de A.; Gil; M.; Sileno; Victor de Paula, J.; Job; Platão; Lara; Y.; Manassés; Leilo; Eleazar; Joao das Regras; Malvolio; and Boas Noites,” all show robust proof of the personal signature and bear the trace of the real Machado de Assis. In an example that would repeat innumerable permutations of the “pseudonyms, cryptonyms or even without signature” that Machado passed for as alter egos, fictional personages, plurinym, Afranio Coutinho offers a litany with overlapping and unique entries: Máximo, Vitor de Paula, Lara, Eleazar, Manassés, M-As, Max, Camilo de Anunciação, Marco Aurélio, Gil, Sileno, Glaucus, Oto, O.O., B.B., X.²

² These heteronyms appear in footnotes of a study by Afranio Coutinho.
In the extant bibliographical studies, often Machado’s pseudonyms are listed in differing, equally incomplete sets by different scholars such that it has been difficult to locate a comprehensive legend to the entire cryptograph. With the assistance of additions to Sousa’s eighteen from *O Almanaque de Machado de Assis* (Aguiar), which repeats some in this list - including “Dr. Semana” from the *Illustrated Weekly (Semana Illustrada)* (1860-1876), adding also “J.J.” (156) and K. David Jackson’s substantial rigor in the attention dedicated to this theme in his masterful *Machado de Assis: A literary life*, where he breaks the story and stresses again Machado’s prolific fury as a ghost writer and anonymous contributor to the Carioca press high and low, far and wide. It is crucial, and convenient to our purposes, that in this section Jackson also makes reference to Machado’s writing, criticism, and translation for theater, but also just broaching a subject whose surface we must but merely grace here, the coincidence of Machado’s *noms de plume* and his role as (trickster) translator (messenger between worlds):

Machado contributed as a translator to Charles Ribeyrolles’s *Le Brésil pittoresque* (1861) and translated into Portuguese novels by Hugo (*Les travailleurs de la mer*, 1866) and Dickens (*Oliver Twist*, 1870). He translated Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Raven,” based on Baudelaire’s French translation, and Hamlet’s well-known monologue. Of his correspondence, half dates from the 1860s; the first of two

---

3 (*Almanaque Machado de Assis*, pg 185).
4 To cite the Italian adage, “traditore: tradutore,” translation is distirion.
volumes of the complete correspondence conclude with two surviving letters to his fiancée, Carolina Novaes, in March 1869. In his columns of the sixties and seventies Machado began to disguise his authorship by using more than twenty-five pseudonyms, initials, and abbreviations, among them M., M.A., Eleazar, Job, Manassés, Marco Aurélio, Max, Máximo, Otto, Próspero, Victor de Paula, Lara, Lélio, A., B.B., F., J., J.B., J.J., O.O., S., X., and Z.Z.Z. These and other disguises prefigure the invention of semi-independent personalities who assume authorship and replace Machado as principal character-narrator-authors in the major novels (Kenneth David Jackson 37).

K. David Jackson notes that the “1860s constitute a formative period” for Machado “of continuous and involved literary activities that shaped the writer in his twenties through theater, poetry, criticism, and journalism” (ibid 37). With the two additions by Aguiar, the thirteen new additions by Jackson, we have a partial, yet expanded record from the twenty-plus mentioned in J. Galante Sousa’s carefully

---

5 “The 1860s constitute a formative period of continuous and involved literary activities that shaped the writer in his twenties through theater, poetry, criticism, and journalism. His first fifteen years in literature and the arts is a period of intensive practice and training by an active youth who courted actresses and opera divas: he wrote poems of effusive praise for Augusta Candiani, who sang in the first performance of Vincenzo Bellini’s Norma at the Theatro São Pedro de Alcântara in 1859, while Anne Charton-Demeur, Annetta Casaloni, and Emmi La Grua, each supported by a group of young fans, performed in three other lyric theaters of Rio: the Gymnasio, the São Januário, and the Lyrico Fluminense. His first fifteen years in literature and the arts is a period of intensive practice and training by an active youth who courted actresses and opera divas: he wrote poems of effusive praise for Augusta Candiani, who sang in the first performance of Vincenzo Bellini’s Norma at the Theatro São Pedro de Alcântara in 1859, while Anne Charton-Demeur, Annetta Casaloni, and Emmi La Grua, each supported by a group of young fans, performed in three other lyric theaters of Rio: the Gymnasio, the São Januário, and the Lyrico Fluminense” (Kenneth David Jackson 37)
annotated list, we have a running total of at least thirty-three pseudonyms under which Machado wrote in his frenzy of literary invention. Yet there remain some productive and mutable problems with this list’s incompleteness – not that an absolute totality is required to begin the revaluation of Machado’s writings inter alia or to revisit closely the ensemble of his paratextual and pseudonymous – sometimes anonymous – works evaluated against the claim of their relative lack in worth to the established canon. As an extension of himself, Machado’s writing is himself in space and the trace of his work’s emergence at a given time.

*I am the Smoke King,*
*I am black!*
*I am wreathing broken hearts,*
*I am sheathing love’s light darts;*
*Inspiration of iron times*
*Wedding the toil of toiling climes,*
*Shedding the blood of bloodless crimes—*
*Lurid lowering ’mid the blue,*
*Torrid towering toward the true,*
*I am the Smoke King,*
*I am black….**
4.1 We Musketeers? Machados de Assis: Written by Themselves

I write in order to doff my masks before they blot out my face.
- Fabian Eboussi-Boulaga, “The Manner”

I have never been myself.
- Jay Wright, Transfigurations

In the illustration of Figure 3, on the cover of the Illustrated Weekly, we read a confession and a revelation in one – a funny puzzle and a humorous riddle: “Today, since everyone masks themselves, allow me to remove my mask.” Can we translate this as ‘Semana Illustrada: always the same’? Or ‘always the meme’? Or, better yet, Always the me, me, me? So, at once a rhetorical question – and a statement of fact: Who? A question, a problem; a literature: Machado de Assis is all of that: gimme fiction.

Figure 3: Machados Unmasked

“Hoje, que todos se mascaram, permitam-me que eu tire minha mascara. – A Semana Illustrada, toujours le même!”
Machado is il/legible as (ghost) writer for numerous works and parties, appearing and mis-appearing *ex machina* of various institutions and journals real and fantastic; depending on who you know or who knows him in the city of Rio de Janeiro, or the pages of the underground railroad, the scales of the black leviathan (that skein of black social networks) – a track he be laying down and flowing over – almost entirely without giving the impression of movement. Peerless, and without contrast, the daddy of Dr. Semana, and the ventriloquist for his characterological counterpart in the cosmos of the *Semana Illustrada*, who is so often depicted speaking only in relation to another character of essentially equal prominence in the very same paper, are themselves each prolific in their own right. Do they, too, have each to their name a litany of pen names within the *Semana Illustrada* and its various afterlives ("A Nova Semana Illustrada") and alter-destinies ("Bahia Illustrada: Publica-Se Todos Os Domingos ")?
Why, of the innumerable entries – essays, letters to the editor, poems, manifestoes and political pronouncements written by O Moleque, both rivaling and doing circles around the lumbering, picaresque, egg-headed Dr. Semana - why is no one quoting, citing, studying and attributing to the only author who could possibly be responsible for the speech the character the insight and the attitude of the Moleque? Is it as bad as Frederick Douglass' situation with his father where people just don’t talk about it in polite company, even at schools? No one, it seems, who knew and enjoyed the fact wants to admit that Machado had a black son; voluminous descendants of the
pen. But since the native son’s double-consciousness is formally realized in the figure of this unpackable pair of signifiers, scrambling Hegel with Dessalines, *O Moleque da Semana* is Machado’s ace in the hole, the invisible man of a decade and a half of glossolalia on record, national (regional) distribution, state of the art technology, even higher levels of craftsmanship and ingenuity – Machado was spinning, scratching, mixing and looping records international and local, present and afar on the gears of the typography and the wires of Transatlantic telegraphic communication – the wheels of steel of the age before and as the dawn of electronic communication.

![Figure 5: COLLINGS OVERLAND TELEGRAPH, (1866)](image)

Nor is that all, by any means. The Moleque is not only Machado’s mouthpiece. Machado gets to be the “alter ego” (qtd in Sousa) of each of these “disguises” (Jackson), and the most long lasting and really transhistorical characters Machado creates, Dr.
Semana and O Moleque, are the masques he performs most often – weekly, for no less than 15 years! As mouthpiece, O Moleque, gets to bear so many gifts of his origin, and gets to be who he is. O Moleque doesn’t have to be demure under the conditions of social death to which he is supposed to be assigned, and which the repeated violence to which he is subjected in the nineteenth century slavery society of Rio de Janeiro, he resists, triumphs over, and manages to resiliently defy by the wit, dignity, and brilliance of his nature.

Nei Lopes, in his *Dicionário Banto do Brasil*, offers a number of different etymological clues and contexts from the original Kikongo (“quicongo” in his spelling in Portuguese) for the word and thus the name of our dark star character of the Semana, by himself, a lesson in New World afrosonics and African diaspora cosmolinguistics:

MOLEQUE, [1], noun (1) “Negrinho” (literally “little Negro). (2) Irresponsible individual. (3) Scoundrel, riffraff, rotter. (4) A boy of young age. …From the Kimbundo muleke, boy, son, corresponding to the Kikongo mu-lëke, child; of the same root as nléeke (pl. mileke), youth, younger brother. MOLEQUE [2], noun (1) Anchor that supports the damaged lining of a house. (2) Magnetic bar used to separate and remove iron particles from gold powder. …From the Kikongo lëke, I pl. ma-lëke, small beam or ceiling beam, iron bar (N. B. Lopes 175-6).

Because he is (who he is as) a moleque, with origins carried in his generic Angolan or Congolese word as his Christian name, the Kimbundu language emanates from his person and Portuguese in a manner so gorgeous and affable in relation to its linguistic siblings, cousins and distant relatives.
O Moleque of the *Semana Illustrada* makes use of everything at his disposal because of the fact that it is inside him, or he can make it, because it is near, or because none of these is true: black survival is the most necessary invention. In the *Semana Illustrada*, it is live music played with the instruments of the image and the text – being ambitious and capable enough to make of that apparatus itself a *deus ex machina*, a magic lantern projecting upon the city of Rio de Janeiro a prismatic fun mirror reflection of itself and its hist-ori-cities. The Moleque’s mission is an intellectual, creative, poetic, critical, and socially savvy enterprise. Dr. Semana is just there to provide a degree of contrast.

![Figure 6: Chiaro(b)scuro](image)

O Moleque (“The Moleque”) certainly presents the most eloquent, shrewd, insightful, jocular, and astute formal member of the staff, not only in his own speech and
behavior, but in the manners of perceiving and misperceiving Afro-Brazilian lifeways that obtained to Machado’s personal observations and treatment of the social apparatus.

Figure 7: Secret 77

Semana Illustrada 1862, left column page 2 (722):
Looking ever ahead, Dr. Machado and Mr. Hyde join together as one to cordially address their subscribers now and forever:

My dearest present and future subscribers,

The semblances of jubilee of which I am possessed by seeing come to a close with this edition the 7th quarter of the Illustrated Week; and I have good reason, because 7 is a number of transcendent importance, which brings flooding to mind a litany of wonderous things of ours and all times. Who doesn’t know that the week has 7 days, the human face 7 openings, the rainbow 7 colors, and the musical scale 7 notes? Everyone knows that there are 7 sacraments, 7 mortal sins, the wonders of the world are 7, the sages of Greece also 7, as well as 7 our Ministers of State? Whoever escapes the 7th day of disease, the 7th year of age after a pernicious fever, can expect a long life. But to exhaust the demonstration with other examples of the enormous value of number 7, even today, the Illustrated Week completes its 7th quarter on the 7th of September, a glorious anniversary of our Independence!7

---

7 September 7 is the date celebrating The Independence of Brazil.
Moleque: - Don’t forget April 7, Lil’ Massa.

[Dr. Semana:] You’re right. Say no more: Long live the number 7!!!

Moleque: "Long live, and God grant that today, one year from now, the Illustrated Week will count 7 thousand subscribers. Whoever wants to be counted in this miraculous number of seven thousand, hurry up as soon as possible to sign up for the Illustrated Week at the Artistic Institute, Avenue of S. Francisco de Paula n. 16."

The Moleque may be the better half of the inveterate bachelor Dr. Semana within the lifeworld of the Semana Illustrada, but in that world and probably this world as well, the better half of O Moleque, it is not Dr. Semana at all, but rather, his muse. She has interesting nicknames too, like The Angel of Midnight (an actual missing play of Machado de Assis). O Moleque’s other other, the more exalted and intimate partner, herself a by herself but behind the scenes character, who is yet never herself given to the types of self-deprecation or petty prevarication in which the two rascals play in all day long. The

* Add to that the Seven Valleys and the Seven Cities and we’re GOLDEN.
representation and naming that take place gradually over the process of the journal’s maturation consolidate and sort, parse and critique the racial and gendered field of the visible and confront controlling images in the modes of their production as representation and discourse.⁹

⁹ Although she plays no role in the household of Dr. Semana, nor in the typographical labor of the imagined workshop of his offices of Dr. Semana, her presentation as an involved and present figure in the life and action, fate and fortune of the Moleque lends credibility to the reflection upon the nature of the real-world printhouse of the Illustrated Week, and the feminist politics of the black press since its inception. Journals founded and published by Brito in the previous decades in which Machado himself apprenticed, would lead and correspond directly to the Typography of the Artistic Institute of Rio de Janeiro, establishing the presence and authority of Mme La Negresse’s periodic appearances in the Semana Ilustrada as a remark upon an ontological grace at the heart and center, at the beginning and throughout the duration of the black press even at the moment of its most articulate segregation by gender in the nineteenth century. The Angel of Midnight’s implicit belonging to the diurnal rhythms of the sun and the moon that make the days of the week, a meta-historical beauty of a person (but who?) which the jocular magazine communicates with nobility, beauty, and gravitas in awkward and eloquent silence. Sileno.
Deeply woven from Machado’s psychic forge of irony and longing, the imitation of life that the serial, episodic, and journalistic narrative of the *Semana Illustrada* improvises over the span of its impressive *durée* witnesses the unique and subversive *enoncé* of “Mme La Negresse” combine at once a fanciful, humorous and entertaining affective feel for the content and characters presented by the Semana in a positive and celebratory depiction of black life as Rio de Janeiro, New World, America. While not sacrificing or impinging on the safe space created by the funny pages, Machado’s deadpan realism, more biting than cold or teeth, in a manner neither of jest or levity, folds into some jokes some very real, disturbing, and even horrifying facts of daily life, especially under the sign of racecraft and slavery.

The chronology and management, the reproduction and evolution of the *Semana Illustrada* owe their being and ordering in large part, in ways both understated and allegorical, to Mme La Negresse, O Moleque’s wife. Her autonomy and the roles she at once fulfills and disrupts epitomize problematics of gendered violence and dogmas portrayed and constructed, developed and deconstructed in the satires of the *Semana Illustrada*. Such a graphic media of remarkable archival and documentary depth reveals the ways in which the discourses of gender and race Machado makes visible within the operations of Brazilian and Atlantic World society in the works of his best known fiction.
arrive “late and bored” to the international market, “The Cane,” “Father versus Mother,” “The Animal Game,” the ‘cronica’ about the slave auction mentioned by Duarte, etc., having already been traced out and bested in Machado’s wild years before the letter became law.

Figure 9: “What do you say to this, Massa?”

Seen in the context of Machado’s larger intervention with respect to the erasure and destruction of the black body in Brazilian popular culture and public life, the painful histories black women of Brazil have endured in silenced registers becomes audible under the scrutiny of the reader evoked by Machado’s trenchant structural critique though image and text. Here’s the rub of the dialectic graphically displayed: if Dr. Semana owns O Moleque as his property (both of whom are Machado), and O Moleque is head of the household, we lose sight of historical, economic, and spiritual
reality depicted in the journal, however temporarily, but nevertheless, we’re already in
the terrordome of the Big House. Not there as slaves or masters: sequestered as black
readers, ensconced in scrawl space; we’re the help sent from our own selves to free us.
You, me, and Machado: the rest of them, even Heinrich Fleiuss, we can put inside the
thought bubble of Machado’s head, for the time being, quoted in the instrumental jam of
his improvisation. How is all this work getting done? Who’s responsible for all this
content, quality, and literature in living color?

That the genealogy of O Moleque and his wife, Mme La Negresse, have a happy
and thriving family – in the logics of Brazilian slavery society means Dr. Semana’s
proprietary increases with time. At the end of the first year of weekly publication and
hand delivered distribution to subscribers by none other than Machado de Assis more
than a few times, so the conceit of the meta-narrative goes, Dr. Semana gets a new
moleque because O Moleque and Mme La Negresse have another son! (See Figure 10).

For each year of the Semana, another generation of Mme La Negresse and O
Moleque’s dissemination. Machado, myself, and I. In any case, it shouldn’t take an
alienist to point out that there are some very pernicious dynamics at play in this mid-
nineteenth-century reality TV show serialized in cartoons and minstrel shows, carnivals
and masques of the most trenchant variety, but to think that all of this is playing out
from and fitted into form from the imagination and collaborations of Machado de Assis
must make even Simão Bacamarte shake his head. Bless his little heart – such a writer can do no wrong if Allah has prevented him from sin by making him lose his mind. Que dispositif!

Figure 9: "...take count yourself. Are there any missing?" Semana Illustrada, no 662.
Machado’s pseudo/-anonymous contributions to the *Semana Illustrada* include not only editing, typesetting and authoring numerous texts – political documents, public service announcements, theater reviews and other news pertaining to the life of the city and of the fictional characters of the *Semana Illustrada* also beloved and proud Cariocas. He also signs his name Nostradamus, Pick Nick, and a few other recurring pseudonyms, which read much like the banter of Dr. Semana and the Moleque, and, for as familiar as they become across numerous editions, at the end of the day, they have some very peculiar ways of thinking, expression, and phrasing. Key words searched in the archives of *Semana Illustrada* for some of Machado’s central themes and experiments turn up strange new, alarming, and beautiful things, like a doctoral thesis spoofing the eccentric intellectual pursuits of the elite Brazilian gentlemen, yet drawing on a vocabulary and repertoire suggestive of Machado’s bohemia; a signifying blackness whether signed or unsigned linking these unattributed pieces to the Machadiana at the very least by their having been published at his quilombo.

Eduardo de Assis Duarte concurs with the ascription to Machado de Assis of Dr. Semana, and adds a few more to the list we are accumulating that now contains over thirty-five pseudonyms and counting. Eduardo de Assis Duarte notes Machado’s adoption of the name Polycarp, in “Crônicas do Relojeiro” (The Watchmaker’s Chronicles); *Dr. Semana* (“Dr. Week”) in *Semana Illustrada*:
With respect to the pseudonyms, Raymundo Magalhães Júnior, in his preface to Machado’s *Diálogos e Reflexões de um Relojoeiro* (Dialogues and Reflections of Watchmaker), considers that, faced with the oppressive environment of the Empire, disguised authorship was a prudent [recourse encouraged] by nearly all the great journalists of the time, for it allowed for shameless commentary, which one could not openly indulge in one’s own name (5–18). On the other hand, it is certain that some of these pennames, specifically the aforementioned Lélio and Malvólio, had their “keys” published separately, as is pointed out by Galante de Sousa in his *Bibliografia de Machado de Assis* (Bibliography of Machado de Assis) (Eduardo de Assis 137).

In volume I of *Correspondências de Machado de Assis* (Machado de Assis et al. 147) we cull the pseudonym “Glaucus,” but this is one of few outliers in the scholarship on this topic not covered in the gathering of Machado’s word masks and inter-alia in the *Bibliografia* or Duarte’s work. Sousa’s provisional compendium is translated and borrowed from at length in what follows, in the order in which it appears in the original

---

10 *Imprensa Acadêmica*, journal of students of the Faculdade de Direito (Law Schoo) of São Paulo. With “Sileno”, Machado signed articles from April to September of 1864. Another pseudonym that appeared in this context was “Glaucus” (Sousa 147)
Portuguese, as a resource for students of Machado, but also as a demonstration of the abundance of pseudo- and hetero-nonymous production.

Alfredo Pujol, referring to Machado’s “tendency toward the treatment of divine subjects,” manifest in Machado’s first literary works, affirms the existence of an essay about Monte Alverne that came to light in 1856 attributed to Machado under the name As. In 1856, Machado de Assis was only in collaboration with the Marmota Fluminense, so far. The study itself can be found in numbers 768 and 769, of 4 and 6 of September in 1856, by the title “Idéias Vagas __ Os contemporâneos __ Monte Alverne,” and is signed “As.,” as are a few other works from this period in 1856 and 1858 (Sousa). Machado is still a teenager and already he has essays and poems out under multiple publications under numerous pen names.


11 Francisco do Monte Alverne (1784 – 1858) is itself an alias or honorific title of the Brazilian Franciscan friar born Francisco José de Carvalho in Rio de Janeiro. Official preacher of the Empire of Brazil, and correspondent patron of the 14th chair of the Brazilian Academy of Letters, Monte Alverne was associated with Romanticism. He was given the surname Monte Alverne, in a reference to the mount La Verna, where Machado’s namesake (through Assis), St. Francis of Assisi received the stigmata. It may perhaps be Mount La Verna (and not the literary and religious figure by that surname) which is the subject or both – having not perused the original but only discovered its bibliographic traces.
Among the myriad monikers, Machado signed numerous of his contributions to Paula Brito’s journal *O Espelho* (*The Mirror*) by the name “M.-as.” Between 1859-1860, one entitled “Revista de Teatros” (n. 9, October 30, 1859), speaks of the author himself in third person: “On Monday, the National Opera opens with *O Pipelé*, an opera in three acts with music by Ferrari, and poetry by Mr. Machado de Assis, my intimate friend, my alter ego, for whom I affectionately esteem, but about whom I cannot offer a single opinion.” Such comments, notes Sousa, leave little doubt of their co-conspiratorial authorship by he, him, and his own self (Sousa).

This one gets me every time: Dr. Semana. This inclusion simultaneously solves one problem and raises another, or it erases one name which survives in the one mentioned in a manner typical, if not stereotypical, of the nature, relationship, and sign(s) Dr. Semana and (or, perhaps, better yet, Dr. Semana by the Moleque). This will take some time to explain, but that’s what this dissertation is here for. “With this pseudonym, Machado signed numerous works in the *Semana Illustrada* (*Illustrated Week*) (Rio, 1860-1876),” writes Sousa, in a precise historical observation that should be more widely known by publishing Machadian scholars, especially given the fact that Dr. Semana and the Moleque are the authorial, staple, and signature characters of the experiment in fiction, journalism, and satire that was the *Semana Illustrada.*
This fact proves that Machado not only contributed heavily to the weekly under various pseudonyms, including entries in his own name, mostly literary and in serious, but also all of the editorial commentary, entertainment, jokes, fables, daily news: all of this is attributable to Machado de Assis, founding member and star sailor of the enterprise. The entire fifteen years run of this magazine, half of which is entirely illustrations by Heinrich Fleiuss with captions by Machado, totals over six thousand pages. Imagine three thousand pages or more with contributions from Machado spanning theatre review, poetry, essay, lampoon, jokes, stories, and more, even seances and telegrams, carnival and letters to city hall: everything was put in the *Semana Illustrada* by Machado through Dr. Semana and, or more likely, his side-kick and heavily racialized partner in rhyme, brother from the same brother, the Moleque. Both Machados\(^1\). How should we title this piece?

\(^1\) “Com este pseudônimo estão subscritos diversos trabalhos na Semana Ilustrada (Rio, 1860-1876), inclusive as crônicas sob o título de Baladas, que começam a aparecer no n. 445 do mesmo periódico (20-6-1869), e prosseguem até o fim da publicação. Diz Max Fleiuss: ‘Foi propriamente na Semana Ilustrada (1860-1876) que Machado de Assis conquistou, com a maior galhardia, os foros de chronista, escrevendo as Baladas da Semana, e assinando-as Dr. Semana’ (A semana, Rio, 1915, pág. 96-97). Isto dá a entender que a autoria da totalidade dessas crônicas pertence a Machado de Assis. Por outro lado, afirma D. Lúcia Miguel Pereira que esse pseudônimo ‘escondeu também os nomes de Pedro Luís, Varejão, Felix Martins, Quintino Bocaiuva e vários outros’ (Machado de Assis, 3. ed., 1946, p. 102)” (Sousa). See note on black writing disrupting conventions of authorship and im/personally expropriating objects of literary resistance from the subject.
Figure 10: At the National Expo

I am the Smoke King,
I am black!
I am darkening with song,
I am hearkening to wrong!
I will be black as blackness can—
The blacker the mantle, the mightier the man!
For blackness was ancient ere whiteness began.
I am daubing God in night,
I am swabbing Hell in white:
I am the Smoke King
I am black.
4.2 (Tw) Invisible Man? The Unseen Machados de Assis

Mirror, mirror; crystal ball: who’s the most ado-ra-ble? With the initials M. A. the author signed a work published in O Espelho (Rio, 1859); a few in A Marmota (Rio, 1860); and a large part of his work for the Diário do Rio de Janeiro (in the columns COMENTÁRIOS DA SEMANA, which should be another clue about the ways in which Machado’s authorship was already associated with the voice and concept of the Weekly cronica as a local literary and journalistic form, however nascent, and “CONVERSAS HEBDOMADÁRIAS,” in the papers O ACASO, etc.), between 1861 and 1865: a poem in A PRIMAVERA (Rio, 1861); a story in Jornal da Famílias (Rio, 1864); four poems (two originals and two translations) in Semana Illustrada (Rio, 1869); a poem in A Luz (Rio, 1872), and a few pieces in A Estação (Rio, 1882-1885). Over time, many of these monikers become revealed to be Machado’s own through their collection by the author in anthologies, as in the case of the story “Frei Simão,” included by the author in Contos.

---

13 “A título de curiosidade, vale a pena transcrever o que contou O próprio autor, na crônica de 11-9-1864: “Que querem dizer estas iniciais? perguntava-se em uma casa esta semana. Uma senhora, em quem a graça e o espírito realçam as mais belas qualidades do coração, disse-me um amigo - respondeu: M. A. quer dizer primeiramente "Muito Abelhudo" e depois "Muito Amável" (Sousa). (What do these initials mean? he asks himself in one case that week [of September 11, 1864]. A woman in whose heart abide the most beauteous qualities of grace and spirit, responded thus, according to a friend: M.A. means, first of all, “The Stinger” and after that “The Singer” [or, more literally, “Mettling as a Bee” (abelha) and/as in “Dearly Beloved” (amado)].)
**Fluminenses** (1870) and originally appearing in the *Jornal das Famílias* of the late Paula Brito’s creation. The two original poems published under M.A. in the *Semana Illustrada*, Sousa notes, "Cegonhas e Rodovalhos" and "Menina e Moça," were included in his second volume of collected poems, *Falenas* (1870). Then come variations, and the rigorous annotations of Sousa, pored over and added to by increments – and others I’ve discovered more recently that may find mention in another paper, or discovery by another compiler of the twenty first century. M. de A.; Gil; M.;14 Sileno; J.;15 Job;16 J. J.;17

---

14 M. “Com esta inicial estão subscrito alguns trabalhos na Semana Ilustrada (Rio, em diversas épocas, entre 1862 e 1874).”
15 Esta inicial subscreveu o conto "Confissões de uma Viúva Moça", no *Jornal das Famílias* (Rio, abril a junho de 1865). O Conto foi posteriormente incluído, pelo autor, em *Contos Fluminenses* (1870).
16 Ten works signed by the author in this name published in the *Jornal das Famílias* (Rio, between 1865 and 1875), and two "Cartas Fluminenses", in *Diário do Rio de Janeiro* (Rio, 5 e 12 de março de 1867). From *Jornal das Famílias*, "Linha Reta e Linha Curva" was included in *Contos Fluminenses* (1870); "A Parasita Azul", "Ernesto de Tal", and "O relógio de Ouro" ended up in *Histórias da Meia-Noite* (1873) (*Histories of Midnight*). ...Para as "Cartas Fluminenses" temos o testemunho de José Alexandre Teixeira de Melo que consignou o pseudônimo no seu trabalho *Dicionário de Pseudônimos e Anônimos Português e Brasileiros* (cf. *Almanaque Brasileiro Garnier* para 1906, pp. 191-196). Nem mais será preciso. Teixeira de Melo e Machado de Assis eram amigos, desde os tempos do Diário do Rio de Janeiro.”
17 Signed stories later published in *Contos Fluminenses* (1870), "A Mulher de Preto" and "Luís Soares" in *Jornal das Famílias* (Rio, between 1866 e 1875).
Victor de Paula “Platão (yes, Plato);” “Y,” another one of his pseudonyms, is found assigned to the poem entry in *Jornal do Comércio* (founded by Pierre Plancher de la Noé) titled “Potira ___ (Fragmento de uma elegia americana)” (“Potira ___ Fragment of an American elegy”) (Rio, 29 de junho e 28 de agosto de 1870). Machado signed Lara (perhaps another of the author’s alter egos as a woman, or doubling his genre trouble?) in *Jornal das famílias* (Rio, 1872 to 1878), for many short stories some of which were included in the 1873 collection *Histórias da Meia-Noite*. Manassés was the pseudonym used in his contributions to *A Época* (Rio, 1875) and *Ilustração Brasileira* (Rio, 1876-1878), where “A Chinela Turca” (“The Turkish Slipper”) and “O Sainete” were first published.

---

18 Signed in *Jornal das Famílias*, em diversas épocas, entre 1868 e 1877. Com ele foi subscrito o conto “Uma Visita de Alcibiades” (*Jornal das Famílias*, Rio, out. de 1876), publicado posteriormente, em texto reformado, mas sob o mesmo título e com a assinatura de Machado de Assis, na Gazeta de Notícias (Rio, 1-1-1882) e incluído em *Papéis Avulsos* (1882). É o próprio autor quem o declara, nesse volume, p. 300, nota: “Este escripto teve um primeiro texto, que reformei totalmente mais tarde, não aproveitando mais do que a idéia. O primeiro foi dado com um pseudônimo e passou despercebido.”

19 Five articles by Machado de Assis of criticism on the work of Adelaide Ristori appear in *Diário do Rio de Janeiro*, em julho de 1869, later published together with contributions from other authors in the volume *Homenagem a Adelaide Ristori* (Rio, 1869). There, on page 18, notes Sousa, there is a note in the first article signed by Platão that reads: “These articles are by the distinct literati Sr. Francisco (sic) Machado de Assis.” Bruh. Y.
The author himself would note in the process of the former’s inclusion in *Papéis Avulsos* (1882) (p.294): “This story was first published in *Época*, n.1, on November 1, 1875. It bore the pseudonym Manassés, with which I signed other articles of that short-lived zine.” Notably, “Eleazar” appears in *O Cruzeiro* (Rio, 1878) as the responsible party for “In the Ark: Three Missing Chapters of Genesis,” included by the author in *Papéis Avulsos* (Uncollected Papers) (Rio, 1882).²⁰

Lelio – with this pseudonym Machado wrote cronica in the section BALADAS DE ESTALO for the *Gazeta de notícias* (Rio, 1883-1886) and a work published by the title "Antes a Rocha Tarpeian" in *Almanaque da Gazeta de Notícias* in 1887. Machado used the pen name “João das Regras” ...in the *Gazeta de Notícias* (Rio, 1886); ...Boas Noites to sign the crônicas titled “Good Nights” (Bons Dias!), in the *Gazeta de Notícias* (Rio, de 5-4-1888 a 29-8-1889), also appearing in *Portugal - Brasil - Anônimos e pseudônimos* mentioned in the *Dicionário Bibliográfico de Inocêncio* edited by Dr José Alexandre Teixeira de Melo, Rio de Janeiro, preserved in the Nacional Library (Sousa). Lastly, let’s observe a moment

---

²⁰ In 1886, in the Rio de Janeiro literary journal *A Semana* (Rio, n. 93, 9-10-1886, p. 327), a banquete in honor of Machado de Assis was announced to celebrate the 22nd anniversary of the publication of *Crisálidas* (Sousa). The notice made reference to “the journalist who has brought us such illustrious pseudonyms as Eleazar, Lelio, and, currently in the *Gazeta de Notícias*, “João das Regras.” Machado signed his name *Malvolio* beneath some rhymed crônicas under the title GAZETA DE HOLANDA, for the *Gazeta de Notícias* (Rio,1887-1888) (Sousa).
previously speculated upon where somebody – let the reader look for clues – in this picture is named “Hamlet-Semana,” and the other, presumably, Dr. Horatio! In one more masque within a masque, Machado’s alter ego gets a new, flattering nickname, which his imaginary sidekick can also contemplate as his own. The title reads “APPEARANCE OF A NEW STAR” and the speaker is Hamlet-Semana, who reflects (announcing a new journal out of Rio called the Orb):

“-Essere o non essere! Vencedor do balconismo da imprensa diaria? That in the question! Whether t’is nobler escrever imparcialmente e oppor-se a uma chusma de questiuinculas pessoais, antes destinadas a encher a bolsa – do que a iluminar o nosso alter ego, o ORBE, com luzes de inteligência...”(Machado de Assis, Fleiuss and Bocaiuva)

Figure 11: APPEARANCE OF A NEW STAR, Semana Illustrada, no 713.
In a mixture of French, Latin, English, Portuguese, and Shakespeare, Machado’s Hamlet-Semana welcomes a new publication into the competitive and dangerous world of the daily press, which he compares to a tightrope (*balconismo*, balancing). Dr. Semana seems with all his black habit and skull in hand to be Machado’s Hamletian double, but then again, the Hamlet we know fondles a Pompei’s cranium, not an orb, and O Moleque appears to be the one leaning against a headstone with a skull nearest him, whereas Dr. Semana leans on a chest of treasure. Why am I arguing and comparing and distinguishing between the to be and not to be? They’re all three: Hamlet, Dr. Semana, and the Moleque, *all* Machado’s mirrored image!

The most famous of Machado’s monikers, though, is well-known in Portuguese as “*o bruxo de Cosme Velho,*” the witch of Cosme Velho (Old Cosmos), sedimented into Brazilian cultural memory in the finest and most appropriate way – by a dedicated student and reverent admirer, himself one of the greatest poets produced by the Portuguese language. Yet I am not bringing up “To A Witch with Love” by Carlos Drummond de Andrade to quote it here (see appendix) so much as to recommend its contribution to the conversation with the speaker of Du Bois’ poem. Or is it The Moleque who breathes in the “Song of Smoke”? 
Figure 12: EX FUMO DARE LUCEM: From smoke let light break forth.

I am the Smoke King
I am black!
I am cursing ruddy morn,
I am hearsing hearts unborn:
Souls unto me are as stars in a night,
I whiten my black men—I blacken my white!
What’s the hue of a hide to a man in his might?
Hail! great, gritty, grimy hands—
Sweet Christ, pity toiling lands!
I am the Smoke King
I am black.
4.3 Caesura ... Rising, or Machado de Assis: About that Life

Figure 13: CESAR RISING

The cover illustration by Heinrich Fleiuss of the Illustrated Weekly (Semana Illustrada), captioned by Machado de Assis, “History of Julius Caesar, By Napoleon III,” portrays the collaborative production of a bizarre mise en scene; not just a book review within a review of books, but a biography posthumously reviewed by the deceased! With the publication in 1865 of the “History of Julius Cesar, Dr. Semana ostensibly sees fit not only to educate himself and the general public on the biography written by the late Emperor Napoleon’s nephew, but also to extend the book to Julius Cesar, the legendary Emperor of Rome, risen from the dead to peruse his biographical treatment centuries later. Napoleon, one of the Semana Illustrada’s frequent targets of
mockery and tribute, might be rolling in his grave – the inside joke and undertone of the joke might be to see what his nephew wrote about Caesar, just imagine what Caesar himself might think. The dialogue of the mise en scene, likely written by Machado, recommends the frame to cinematic production; imagined as prequel to Michael Jackson’s Thriller, this experimental black short: Get Out for historical documents, ghosts of archives:

CESAR: Let’s see how this biographer treated me … Who will bring me my Commentaries?

DR. SEMANA: Here’s the book…

MOLEQUE: (aside) Give compass to the dead should they rise!21

To give the dead reading material for critical review in order to orient them to the true north of current events might be another meaning of compass despite its obvious and illustrated meaning affectively performed by Moleque’s humorous shock, fright at the rising of the dead, grave and flighty theatrical antics of a midnight masque. *Quasi una fantasia* (Moten "Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)"). Emphasis on “nearly,” or “almost”; these fictions, who are very real, are surely a

21 “te das compas os mortos se levantam!” (cover illustration of Semana Illustrada no. 226.).
literature which, although it can mostly be read as fantasy, breaks upon the everyday life of politics and other pastimes, for example, with Frederick Douglass' Tweets *d’outre tombé*, and the fantastic job he is still doing worldwide, at home, abroad, and in translation.

### 4.4 What a Difference a Day Makes

![Figure 14: "What a difference!"

Figure 14: "What a difference!"

What a difference a day makes. On the cover page of *Illustrated Weekly (Semana Illustrada)* no. 513. Dr. Semana stands in statue with arms crossed, looking for all the world like Napoleon, stranded in his last days on St. Helena. In the smaller-sized frame to the right, a geographical clue cuts into the frame with *the writing on the wall*:

“Wilhelmshohe” suggests nothing here but the scene of 1870/71 in which Napoleon III is granted amnesty by the Prussian King after his defeat in the Franco-Prussian war. Yet the color of the actor’s skin (here, referring of course to Moleque playing counterpoint and prodigal heir) suggests an alternate reading from the left to right in the illustration of chronological history and genealogical descent at the genetic level, and think instead of the writing on the orb at the foot of the actor: “UNIVERSO.” Now, compared to Napoleon stranded on St. Helene’s one is reminded of the great difference between his last days and those of Toussaint L’Ouverture’s spent in captivity in the French prison castle. In that visual read, the narrative depicts the Haitian General and liberator seated comfortably, holding a bottle of champagne in his left hand and a crystal glass in his right, reclining with his left boot propped on a globe upon which is written in capital letters the name of the stage and platform upon which his own life’s deeds are impressed and imprinted. One stranded on a lonely island, the other alone at the top of the world: dialectics of Machadian reflection: what difference, indeed.
On one hand each drawing is an historiographical truism in itself, but taken together, Napoleon and Toussaint become thesis and antithesis, producing a series that promises to reveal the truth or a meaning not only about their respective fates and fortunes, but also about their personal character and the spiritual consequence of their involvement in world historical processes. Here we thus have pictured Dr. Semana as Napoleon of the French people and colonial Old World’s demise speaking volumes in a primitive and oracular binary code. Dr. Semana as Napoleon puts Napoleon to use as a floating signifier for more than a people, but also a cause and a relation to time and space which O Moleque’s Toussaint L’Ouverture signify upon by turns. The juxtaposition of the two images which, interlocked like puzzle pieces, forms a composite image that could be said for being dialectical to retrace the steps of the dialectical image of which Benjamin speaks, which only attains its historical significance at a particular moment in time. Haitian Independence would indeed take a cosmic, universal approach, dwarfing even the world famed Napoleonic achievements in moral, spiritual, and political salience.
4.5 Spell on America: Confessions of a Black Reader and the Woman M/Ark

So it really seems to you that what happened to me in 1860 is worthwhile writing down? … do not divulge it before my death. You’ll not have to wait long …; I am a marked man.
- Machado de Assis, “The Attendant’s Confession”

Let’s face it. I am a marked woman, but not everybody knows my name….My country needs me, and if I were not here, I would have to be invented.
– Hortense Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe”

The narrator’s tale was obviously thought worth writing down by someone along the way, for Machado’s short story shows evidence of having been both published and translated. As such, a chain of transmission of the text in its printed version is implied from the form of the narrator’s opening address and the genre headlined in the title. This confession, published in 1896, was one of the first writings of Machado to be translated into English, and was included in the compilation Brazilian Tales, translated by Isaac Goldberg alongside “Vida” as “Life” (the story of Ahasuerus, the last man, and “O Cartomante” known as “The Fortune Teller.” Prescient posthumous personae Machado and the narrator of “The Attendant’s Confession” (also translated as “The
Nurse”), the speaker / narrator addresses the reader from a liminal point of no return between life afterlife:

Look, I could tell you about my entire life, during which time other interesting things took place; however, in order to do that, one needs time, spirit, and paper, and I have only paper. My spirit is weak and time resembles a night lamp at dawn. It will not be long before the sun rises on another day. It is the sun of demons, as impenetrable as life. Good-bye, my dear sir. Read this and wish me well; forgive me for whatever seems improper to you. Do not mistreat the rue if it does not smell like a rose. You asked me for a human document, and here it is. Do not ask me for the empire of the Great Mongol, nor for a photograph of the Maccabees; ask me, however, for my death shoes, and I will not give them to anyone else (K. David Jackson 61).

The story, told by a former nurse with a guilty conscience for his complicity in his patient’s ultimate demise, like “In The Ark” and “A Visit from Alcibiades,” to mention only a few, also presents itself as a found document, and the narrative itself bookended and presented in the form of both the binding legality of the last testamentary form and the indefinite suspension of its validity pending the condition of the deceased or not (to be) deceased; contingent upon the open ended possibility of the production of subsequent documents. The fiction’s own conceit or engano meets the epistolary apparatus in such a way as to make of the reader a complex adjudicator and multiple listener–judge, jury and executor, as it were–as well as priest and coroner, attending all the separate valences of the text made visible in the address. This
correspondence of a story to be disseminated is also the address of a posthumous person extended and suspended in time.

For the author to be laid to rest in whatever ritual manner proceeds conceptually or existentially from the process of reading the tale (decomposition?), the judgement exercised by the reader vis a vis the innocence or guilt, merit or absurdity of the author has been foreseen and predestined by the writer. The free indirect discourse of the narrator suggests the point of view of a narrator facing immanent death, issuing last words in a confessional narrative addressed only to the happenstance stranger – in another translation, K. David Jackson translates “desenganado” as “incurable” rather than “marked.” Same difference?

Like Spillers’ opening to the essay “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” these texts address the reader with the ominous liminality of a subject becoming-specter, drawing on the narrative language of the dialogical or epistolary voice to the effect of making the text both a confessional document and an informational puzzle; in the case of Machado’s story, the speaker (who suggests that his narrative at the point of our reading it has not yet been written, but is directly told to the reader) delivers as if an impromptu autobiography as will and testament. They both testify in different languages to the trace of the same truth: I am an inevitable person. To be “enganado”, (the opposite of “des-enganado,” the latter meaning to be deceived), suggests that the mortal danger faced by
the narrator is, like the imperceptibility of an invisible man, a function not of her/his own
disintegration but of the integrity with the specter of difference, togetherness with the
beyond through a breakdown (which is sometimes the same caesura as a mixtape) in
social sustenance transfiguring his last breath into sedimented documentation on paper
of an otherwise silenced history.

A composite of their statements, “I am a marked wo/man” could be further
revised in a variation between the two confessions of everlasting parrhesia: “I am a
mark.” The name of the narrator in the tale itself a sort of code which we have seen in
the previous chapter, and leads into the dark irony of the story as a figure for the past’s
insistence upon remembrance, entrusted to the future. The explanatory tale reads
almost like the genre of early carceral literature, and centers the “confession” upon the
ultimate confusion resulting from the conflict between himself and the elderly patient he
attends to for his livelihood.

I told him and he looked astonished. Colombo? No, sir: Procópio José Gomes
Valongo. Valongo? He did not think the name befitting for a person and decided
to call me simply Procópio, to which I answered that whatever he decided would
suit me. I am telling you this detail not only because I believe it describes him well,
but also because my answer showed the colonel the best in me.

The ‘double take’ of the colonel, and the initial mishearing of the name Valongo,
mistaking it for Colombo, invite a select variety of associations, but the immediate
misdirection to the propitious and invented moniker “Procópio” (pro(to)-copy?) gathers
numerous elements for musing. The irony, on one hand, of Valongo recurring in Machado’s texts, as if insisting even in allegorical and subtle ways on the persistence of a social ghost of the ongoing tragic legacies of slavery and an absent reconstruction since the times of Columbus. Perhaps our narrator submits to “whatever …suit” his employer decided in obedience to the new handle; an eternal return of the secrets and deceits (enganos) constitute the background of Brazilian identity formations.22

He himself reported this to the vicar, adding that I was certainly the friendliest of his nurses. Truth be told, we had a honeymoon of seven days. On the eighth day, I began the life of my predecessors: a dog’s life, with no sleep nor any other thought, gathering insults and, at times, laughing at them with an air of resignation and conformity. I realized it was a form of homage to him (Goldberg).

The irreducibility of what it seems to mean to be a “problem” or a “mark[ed being, a being-marked]” to the concerns of both of these works is a part of the dis/abilities of second sight that presents black writing as the moment of its becoming personal testimony, address, call, and exhortation, document, and evidence of things unseen. Each of these confessors and narrators qualified by their being “marked” link this “adjective” or “genitive” to the sociality of a cogito prefigured in relation: “my

22 Here I am thinking of another title; el engano de las razas.
The structure of the double mark (caught – both seized and entangled – in a binary opposition, one of the terms retains its old name so as to destroy the opposition to which it no longer quite belongs, to which in any event it has never quite yielded, the history of this opposition being one of incessant struggles generative of hierarchical configurations) works the entire field within which these texts move. This structure itself is worked in turn: the rule according to which every concept necessarily receives two similar marks – a repetition without identity – one mark inside the other outside the deconstructed system, should give rise to a double reading and a double writing. And, as will appear in due course: a double science. No concept, no name, no signifier can escape this structure (Derrida and Johnson).

The instance both generic and situational of the ex-/slave narrative as “collective mouths” (being doubly or severally marked and marking) presents the autobiographical voice as both less and more than Cartesian subject. Procopio, or Valongo, reaches out to the reader to testify to events which can only be experienced as a tale.

Black literature, then, as “human document. Here it is.” Although Machado’s writing does not formally imitate a “slave narrative” from the generic conventions of its study in the US academy, where the most robust abolitionist movement in print became responsible for the production of a repository retrospectively consolidated as a discrete and particular literature with all of its self-organizing categories and forms.
Yet doubling as a confession of murder, a last will and testament, a literary experiment, and a cryptograph of a variety of historical, psychological, and social insights, the text of “The Attendant’s Confession” bristles with the complexity of a representative work in the genre of slave narrative so defined by canonical American literary scholarship; Confessions of Nat Turner, Box Brown, carceral confessions, transcripts of oratorical performances, sermons (the writer of the letter is a theologian), letters of correspondence (such as the authenticating “letters” and other documents which become part of the credentials and inter-personhood of the black literary work). If the "marked woman” of the essay’s authorship is also a woman-mark(ed), an ontological being-literary, then the essay we read doubles as a confession on the part or on behalf of the reader: without commandeering it, the writer observes; you, dear reader, are the one who is marking the mark; you are the one who notes the noting.

Instead of “Columbus” in “Colombo,” the sonic coincidence between the Colonial emissary par excellence and an anti-colonial force seems to come into view in the Portuguese – I am speaking here about the slight ring to the sound of the words Quilombo and Colombo. Names need not be translated as other nouns are, and yet new levels and layers of signification come into view if we take the practice of misunderstanding further and deliberately, if not only speculatively, to think of the complexity of personhood developed by the character – who would find any name
suitable – in relation to these two proper names and uncountable nouns in the psyche of Brazilian history; the Valongo at Rio de Janeiro and the Quilombos of Palmares.

Marking “sutures” gender and sexual difference into the milieu of signs and their significance by this double overture to race and gender (“…marked woman….”),

hailing the reader in such an open, or welcoming way contrasts to the forms of exemplary interpolation by patriarchy’s persistent violence; the “hey you” of the policeman in Althusser, or in Fanon, “Look, Mommy, a Negro!” Much ado about noting. In a non-prescriptive or open way, before the letter and as post-script, the “marked woman” unconceals her dissimulation without accusation or whatever polemic would begin by drawing light upon the normative assumption that the writer is always white, and male, and after Barthes, dead. Whatever “us” is contracted in conjunction

23 “…these lacerations, woundings, fissures, tears, scars, openings, ruptures, lesions, rendings, and punctures of the flesh create the distance between what I would designate a cultural vestibularity and culture, whose state apparatus, including judges, attorneys, “owners,” “souldrivers,” “overseers,” and “men of God,” apparently colludes with a protocol of “search and destroy.” This body whose flesh carries the female and the male to the frontiers of survival bears in person the marks of a cultural text whose inside has been turned outside. The flesh is the concentration of “ethnicity” that contemporary critical discourses neither acknowledge nor discourse away. It is this “flesh and blood” entity, in the vestibule (or “pre-view”) of a colonized … America … [this] materialized scene of unprotected female flesh – of female flesh “ungendered” – [which] offers a praxis and a theory, a text for living and for dying, and a method for reading both through their diverse mediations” (207).
with what this letting ("let's") lets us face, whatever "it" would bring them face to face, is marked by "a … woman."

Spillers' opening line performs a speech act that functions as a "hook." Here the synchrony of music, fishing, and film, for the projection of an image for the reader (since "to theorize" means to make visible) appropriately reflect the media and mediation that are implied in what it means to face the mark of the unknown, face the faceless mystery of anonymous, the variable, "the other woman"; "X": "I am a marked woman, but not everybody knows my name." (203). She, herself, has been "hailed," but her address, shifting between testimony and confession, orature and auto-biography, opens the reader to a severality by way of this mark that places in question the stability of an opposite, or the singularity of a textual interlocutor, for the writer addressing the reader announces herself by the names by which she has been called, as if stepping out from behind them:


The repetition of difference here, as if inflating identity itself with difference, spilling over the liminal boundaries of this series of what Patricia Hill Collins has called "controlling images," wrests any notion of their stability as signifiers or the chain of
discourse that announces them into the limbo of the dis-positionality and opacity of the “marked woman” writer. By naming these names, which describe “a locus of confused identities” as herself, or as this “I” that figures not so much as a cogito or subject but as a “meeting ground,” she opens the archive “from below,” resituating the foundations for discourse by another name. She names herself as a black woman writer in the act of writing as well as across the times and spaces of her being called, opening nomenclature to a radical interrogation beyond the (etymological root of the) word or the name, beyond the identity, cogito or subject, into the collective, ancestral, cosmological and phenomenological dimensions of history.

In this way Spillers opens the essay on writing, in the modality of a black materiality, with an “attentiveness … to names and acts of naming” (184) which “accenting a discrepancy between name and named so as to signify on the act of naming and, by implication, the context in which that act takes place.” Spillers, as Nathaniel Mackey writes of Toni Morrison, “heightens the contradictions in order to make a point, to make several points” about the “discrepant relationship between name and named” which “recalls the history of dispossession that haunts the act of naming for the African American…in the context of this New World” (185). The extension of this dispossession, the haunting of “the act” of naming, and of writing, this abiding suspension in limbic flight suggests a paradoxical position, or dis-position of Afro diasporic life and black
writing that refigures “marked woman” as fugue, revising a note by Mackey on Wilson Harris: “Fugue of [wo]man.” (Discrepant Engagement, 174). In the African diaspora historicity of the “American Grammar Book,” the phrase fugue of marked woman would be almost the same name and saying as: “the actual act of writing” (172).

For limbo (one cannot emphasize this too much) is not the total recall of an African past since that African past in terms of tribal sovereignty or sovereignties was modified or traumatically eclipsed with the Middle Passage and within generations of change that followed. Limbo was rather the renascence of a new corpus of sensibility that could translate and accommodate African and other legacies with a new architecture of cultures. For example, the theme of the phantom limb – the reassembly of dismembered [wo]man or god – possess archetypal resonances that embrace Egyptian Osiris, the resurrected Christ and the many armed-armed deity of India. … [and] … the limbo dance becomes the human gateway which discloses (and therefore begins to free itself from) a uniform chain of miles across the Atlantic. … The limbo dance therefore implies … a profound art of compensation which seeks to re-play a dismemberment of tribes … and to invoke at the same time a curious psychic re-assembly of the parts of the dead gods. And that re-assembly which issued from a state of cramp to articulate a new growth – and to point the necessity for a new kind of drama, novel and poem – is a creative phenomenon of the first importance in the imagination of a people violated by economic fates (Wilson Harris, qtd in Mackey 169-170).

Mackey goes on, in reading Harris, to summarize the way in which the latter links “limbo to vodun, the Haitian possession rites derived from West Africa,” quoting Harris again at some length: “African vodun is a school of ancestors…characterized by” what Mackey interprets as “a phantom extension into the novel ‘inarticulacy’ brought about by the Middle Passage, into imaginative reassemblies, resourceful acts of bricolage.” (170). In full endorsement of these poetic and associative hermeneutics of
“Middle Passage” as graphic inscription of a fugitive logic and social cohesion, Mackey reads Harris as “making a case for the imagination” (170).

The social fact of the woman mark, rather than requiring consensus or depending upon recognition by a social persona, declares, in the invisibility she reveals, the opacity she announces before the face of such a reader, marks the reader with the contagion or the tinted reflection of whatever attributes he or she projects into the ground of this racial and gendered stuff of the mark, that hook which anchors the facticity to a domain of signification and a milieu of signs wherein this womb of space demarcates the writing of “the whole woman” (Cixous qtd in Marassa 19)

Hortense Spillers, the author, transgresses the limit set by life at the death of the white male author; she expropriates this vanishing point of identity claiming its atavistic foundations are laid in the abyss of the invisible [wo]man, whose erasure from subjectivity is a sub-text of the history of the socialization of the cogito. Race is not in the past; no matter how many names she may “have been called,” her blackness is neither utopian nor nostalgic, it is mythological, social, and ontological “fact.” Spillers’ surreptitious speech emphasizes the remainder of the person, the autonomous social life that exceeds the controlling images and national fictions at the same time that she demonstrates their capacious function in a symptomatic reading, a semiotic auscultation of the material history of American culture’s foundation, fabric, and roots from the
standpoint of black feminine consciousness, embodiment and resistance. Wilson Harris, in *The Womb of Space* writes:

> It is necessary to make clear within the fabric of imaginative exploration .... that homogeneity is a biological hypothesis that relates all mankind to a basic or primordial [African] ancestor, but as a cultural model, exercised by a ruling ethnic group, it tends to become an organ of conquest and division because of imposed unity that actually subsists on the suppression of others (Harris xvii).

Ark in imagination’s limb(o), linking epidermalization to the epiphanic relation between race/origin and land/people as a geomantic history of relations. Her discourse and her person thus cut across the subject, its domain, and its other, herself, introducing to the context of the text itself and the content of the signification the phantasmagoric or fantastical materiality of the woman mark made flesh, or image-text, exceeding the value system and thwarting even the exhaustion of logos. The fugitivity of the marked woman writer is thus so real, concrete, material and present while simultaneously figurative, negative, spectral and dialectical that it reveals black writing as return of the repressed, or an uncanny upheaval “of an underworld imagination” (Harris, qtd in Mackey, 170).

The diffraction of the “marked woman” into the “voice” of authorial self-possession produces a radiant opacity around the evacuated space of the singular subject. The plurality of reiterative nomenclature functions, then, as a reflection of the shattering of the ossified foundations of discourse; her interruption of the index and
subversion of the sign produce a disruption in the indexicality of the symbolic reference
born, in any case, of the racist imagination (an anxiety, desire, or mixed necessity) of the
other:

Therefore, the female, in this order of things, breaks upon the imagination with a
forcefulness that marks both a denial and an “illegitimacy.” Because of this
peculiar American denial, the black American male embodies the only American
community of males handed the specific occasion to learn who the female is within
itself… It is the heritage of the mother that the African-American male must regain
as an aspect of his own personhood – the power of “yes” to the “female” within
(Spillers 228).

A necessity of language, history, and the imagination themselves at the
vanishing point of the woman and her remarkable language body, the mark of the
woman as an anonymous, serial, and thus unsayable name; the name that everybody
knows not everybody knows; the womb of space / sea of signs / milieu of meanings:
“This different cultural text actually reconfigures, in the historically ordained discourse,
certain representational potentialities…” in which “only the female stands in the flesh…”
(Spillers, 229). To know her name beyond the anonymity of the masques that have been
devised for and by the other, Hortense Spillers speaks less of her own severalness than
her work provides evidence of the case she makes in the metaphysics of a style –
parlayed by ancestral precedents – in a text “written by herself.”

Within the domain of signs opened up by the milieu of language, writing, which
encompasses and exhausts that domain, is both its overflowing (“inflation”) and the
evacuation ("exhaustion" or "emptying") of that domain insofar as "literature does not exist...it is nothing." But, only insofar as this negative is viewed as a productive absence, or a product of relation, though it does not partake in being (Glissant), in that Shakespeare Effect (Moten) where "nothing comes from nothing" actually means something "comes from" the repetition, the doubling, the inflation of "nothing" (i.e, the word "nothing" comes; ex nihilo (the signifier is arbitrary), as the sign of itself (the signified is a signifier) and also that, like the chain of signifiers, the chain of supplements suggests that this "nothing" (as everything, or anything else spoken or written depends upon) implies signification. "Signifying nothing[s]": "To write is incessant, and yet the text only advances by leaving behind lacunae, gaps, tears, and other interruptions, but the breaks themselves are rapidly reinscribed..." (Roger Laporte qtd in Blanchot The Writing of the Disaster).

The point here is that language and literature are full of references to and consist of the break, the gap, or space between signifiers; the logocentrism of the word has built into it the conditions for the revolution in poetic language, or creolization. If music and myth are what come out in the break down, "wounded kinship's last resort," then "Prose is first of all an attitude of mind" (Sartre 20):

When one is in danger or in difficulty he grabs any instrument. When the danger is past, he does not even remember whether it was a hammer or a stick; moreover, he never knew; all he needed was a prolongation of his body, a means of extending his hand to the highest branch. It was a sixth finger, a third leg, a short, a pure
function which he assimilated. Thus, regarding language, it is our shell and our antennae; it protects us against others and informs us about them; it is a prolongation of our senses, a third eye which is going to look into our neighbor’s heart. We are within language as within our body. We feel it spontaneously while going beyond it toward other ends, as we feel our hands and our feet; we perceive it when it is the other who is using it, as we perceive the limbs of others (20-21).

To grasp the instrumental nature of writing as an extension of the body beyond its boundaries one would have to invoke the spectral and/or spiritual nature of what writing gathers, conveys, and performs such that this bodily or somatic trace of writing is irreducible to and inseparable from the present absence of the author.

So to think with Nathaniel Mackey and Wilson Harris about the “phantom limb” (N. E. Mackey 238) or liminality of the “limbs of others” wherewith the expression and performance of reading confronts us in everything (signified) with a sign (signifier) reveals the underlying vitality of myth as “a text that can break down into pieces and reveal human experience and social order” (Mudimbe 142-3). History and myth; signifying everything, signifying nothing: “Expression of infinitude, expression of nothing: do these go together? Yes, but without agreement. Without agreement but without discord” (Blanchot The Writing of the Disaster). As Mudimbe writes,

The most prudent (also the most trivial) generalization about African systems of thought might be that myth and society are autonomous but respond to one another. More exactly, the myth signifies human experience to the point that reality loses its meaning without it (143).
This amounts to a formulation of exemplary economy in the one-page essay by George Bataille called “The Absence of Myth,” wherein he argues that “the absence of myth” is itself the only true and enduring myth (Bataille and Richardson); the fictional nature of myth is only an illusion.

_the basic premise of the African ideology of otherness: history is myth._

- V-Y Mudimbe, _Invention of Africa_

Machado’s narrator in “The Immortal,” offers a personage of passing singularity as a metaphor for history itself – to be admired and critiqued by turns – is a remarkable ancestor. In some kind of archaeological imagination of a spiritual history of the “layers of attenuated meanings, made an excess in time, over time, assigned by a particular historical order, and there await[ing the] marvels” of Machado’s self-invention, the narrator of this story tells a tale of descent or parentage plus. The first line of the first chapter announces the dangerous supplement of the transhistorical memory as a life, spanning generations, centuries, putting a fine point on Machado’s writerly obsession with ancestors:

“My father was born in 1600…”
“Excuse me, but you mean 1800, naturally…”
“No, sir,” replied Dr. Leão, in a sad and solemn manner, “it was 1600 (Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis Stories 63).
The life narrated by Machado’s narrator tells of an ancient ancestor who is also a present guide and influence, combining a Yoruba egungun (ancestor spirit) with a genealogy of relation and descendant across the span of centuries. A transhistorical Candide type of figure evoked in the transmigrations of the father “born in the year 1600, in the [Brazilian] city of Recife” (65) and became a Franciscan monk for the first 39 years of his life, serialize a set of picaresque misadventures.

In short, the priestly calling, Dr. Leão’s father leads him to a missionary life amongst the indigenous peoples of Brazil whom he comes to love and trust as family. One day, becoming involved in the last rites of an “indigenous chief,” consuming a magic potion that grants immortality entrusted to him by an “indigenous chief – whose name was Pirajuá,” and a dear friend of Dr. Leao’s. Needless to say, his father ultimately drank some of the potion and the result was that he endured the death of everyone he knew for many ages and engaged in myriad affairs and adventures narrated and summarized by Dr. Leão to his amazed company.

“As you can see from what I’ve already told you, if I were to describe my father’s entire life in detail, I wouldn’t finish the story today, nor even this week. Someday I’ll do this, put it all in writing. I imagine that the whole story would take up five volumes, not counting the additional documents…”

“What documents?” asked the notary.

“The corroborating documents I possess: titles, letters, manuscripts of judicial decisions, copies of legal documents, statistical documents… For example, I have a census certificate from 1742 of a certain neighborhood in Genoa, where my father eventually died. It bears his name, along with his place of birth…” (78).
This need for and reference to authenticating documents is interesting, and reflective of the self-consciousness of the author – now concealing his narrator within diegetic dialogue – in making good on the process of suture, crafting the supports and evidences, the documents for the production as well as the proof of his own immortality, and the immortality itself of descent.

Now just imagine, in 1965 [should read 1695], my father participated in the conquest of the famous Quilombo of Palmares. He fought valiantly and lost a friend, a close friend, riddled with bullets, stripped of his skin…” “Stripped of his skin?”

“It’s true. The blacks used boiling water to defend their settlement, and my father’s friend took a whole kettle full. His entire body was a festering wound…”

The notary grimaced, and the colonel, to disguise his repulsion, asked what the conquest of Palmares had to do with the woman who…(79)

24 This typo in the text seems somewhat providential and oracular, yet I have no knowledge as yet of what it could mean. Still, from the context of the text, which I am quoting, not my translation, it seems clear and from the original, confirmed, that the year printed in this edition was a typo. Unless the editor has made an historical discovery of a much more recent nature pertaining to the persistence of Palmares in the 20th century.
“It has everything to do with her,” said the doctor, continuing his story (80). To be stripped of one’s skin, as awful an image as the author conjures from the wounds of battle is no less painful for history or culture. Although in the narrative the immortal is seemingly a mercenary fighting against the free blacks, whites, and indigenous peoples of the Quilombo of Palmares, “it has everything to do with” the story – and the narrator’s conception! How interesting indeed that both the narrator and the story owe themselves to the same …what? Not merely an event, or idea: the quilombo is something really beyond facile definition as an object or process, idea or theory. Abdias do Nasciemnto has shown that it is vastly more rich and significant than that – it is ecology, rememory, culture in constant movement.

The narrator reminds us that people of European descent were included among those who defected from empire to share allegiance with the motley crew of refugees of

---

25 “Even as my father saw his friend die, he was able to save the life of an officer, taking an arrow in the chest in the process. It happened like this. One of the blacks, after shooting down two soldiers, turned his bow toward the officer, who was a kind and courageous young man who had lost his father and left his mother behind in Olinda…My father knew that the arrow wouldn’t do him any harm, so he jumped in front of it. The arrow wounded him in the chest and he fell to the ground. The officer was named Damiao… Damiao something or other. I won’t give his full name, because he still has some descendants in Minas Gerais.”

Is this gesture from the narrator not the repetition of a key theme of elision and dissimulation we’ve seen in the narratives of the lives of Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, and others who testify to a condition of fugitivity within the habits of passing show?
colonial civilization forming the rhizomes of and ranks of uncountable quilombos throughout Brazil. This best known instance and legendary history of Palmares, entered as a scene of the immortal’s millennial career in Machado’s tale situates the narrative environment of fiction as a sort of quilombo around the center post of this community merging history and myth by extending the time of consciousness through the long durée of the eighteenth century beyond the life-span of nations and nationalisms: "Quilombismo, an Afro-Brazilian theory of social and political organization, is also a proposal for global organization of Brazilian statehood, based on our own history and values" (Nascimento 105). The fact of Machado’s literary testament to the conquest of Palmares involves him in its ancient and contemporary histories of resistance and marronage at the margins and raises the question of the agential subject of history. Who is history about?

When his father had come to rest again in Rio de Janeiro in his native Brazil:

...He was dying, and told me, with his tongue faltering, that the homeopathic principle had been his salvation. *Similia similibus curantur.* He had drunk the rest of the elixir, and just as the first half had given him life, the second half gave him death. Having said this, he passed away (89).
Disforming and becoming the American canon, black texts are “made eternal by elegant combination” of elements that offer a lesson to posterity, dictating not a particularity of our comportment but the environmental context within which we make such reflections organizing and disposing the orientations of historical vision and personal performance of life.

4.6 Quilom-byss: The Abyss of Quilombo and New International Ogum

Taking Susan Buck-Morss’ acclaimed study *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* away from the Hegelian thought process and toward the primary documents of the revolution’s own political and theoretical conscience – in its own words – heads us in the direction of a Cosmic frame equally fit to the contemplation of our place amongst the stars, yet including rather than excluding the African spirit, genius and writing in diaspora that makes of the all one thing. If the events of the Haitian Revolution and the emergence of the “master-slave dialectic” in observation of the en masse resistance of the object of colonialism and slavery occur in a dialogical relation between Hegel’s thinking philosophically about the history of himself and his world-conquering colonial center, then it isn’t just the insurrection of bloodshed but the resurrection of myth and history as political document and the gears of war turned into printing press. “Was it
an act of "revolution from below," Buck-Morss asks, questioning the received wisdom about the so-called Black Jacobins themselves, was it “the ‘self-sustained activity of the masses?’” (136). Yes. “Dialectics is a challenge from below” (Adorno Negative Dialectics).

But what does she (or Marx, for that matter!) mean by “masses?”

Was it a case of premodern laborers breaking out of traditional forms of peasant resistance, finally aiming to overthrow the system of slavery itself? Or, was the ceremony initiated by elite leaders whose use of certain African motifs was "calculated to mobilize support"? Did this event indicate elaborate organization, or the lack of it? Was it "a revolt that broke out prematurely," an unauthorized break in discipline before the conspiracy was supposed to start? And what of the ideology of the insurrection? Was it news from Paris, perhaps the Declaration of the Rights of Man that emboldened the insurgents? Or was the French Revolution peripheral even for the leaders, as it was "liberty for all," not French republicanism they desired? The view that the Bois Caiman blood pact was specifically Dahomean is "difficult to reconcile" with the fact that Kongo slaves were in the majority in the area, where a Ki Kongo political chant was recorded on the eve of the revolution. The "Good Lord" evoked in Boukman's exhortation has been identified as pagan, specifically, the lead god of Dahomey, but the Kongo majority had been officially Christian since Portuguese Catholic missionaries converted the Kongo king in 1491.

All of these interpretations have been put forward of an event that may not even have happened. It is almost as if it had to happen for interpretation to exist at all. Bois Caiman has assumed signifying power for political judgments that are radically diverse. It is used to mean that Haiti entered into modernity proper because it joined the European story, the only story that counts. Or, it means that with Haiti, history has surpassed this narrative, leaving Europe behind. Or, it means that Haiti has become a nation-like other nations, like Europe, complete with its own military honors, pedigree of "founding fathers," and bloody birth through the sovereign sacrifice of human life. This fight for ownership of Haiti’s past revolutionary glory diverts attention from Haiti’s deplorable present reality. It seems crude to discuss Haiti as a bastion of historical significance, when today it is the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere, and when expressions of the political will of the Haitian people continue to this day, after two hundred years, to be hamstrung by the intervention of foreign powers (Buck-Morss 136-7).
Interpretations vary, and competing claims about this episode and its meanings in history abound; so it is not clear whether or not it is true let alone what reasons or lessons can be gleaned from the details forwarded by the historian or the mythographer. It is unclear, for example, how to read and analyze the anecdotal and interpretive chain of transmission between parenthetical and other forms of political enframing especially in such contested terrains of the silenced past.

When Buck-Morss reflects upon the political lessons of the 1791 Haitian Revolution as its mythology has presented the events and spiritual forces gathered at Bois Caiman, she wisely (or not) cautions against attempts to recuperate the heroism or simplify the tumult of the occasion and its process. “Haitian political leaders persecuted Vodou priests even before independence,” she adds, then follows with a note citing C.L.R. James' *Black Jacobins*, “(Under Toussaint's orders, Dessalines slaughtered over fifty Vodou practitioners, whose own definition of the insurrection threatened their monopoly of power.)” Is this explanation consistent with what we know or want to know about Dessalines, Toussaint, or voduassaint (Vodun faithful)? Her analysis continues to proceed from generalization to reflection en route to platitude:

Vodou practice was pushed to the margins, an embarrassment for "modern" Haitian elites, yet it has remained a way of manipulating the poor peasantry, hence a source of power for political oppositions of every persuasion. To narrate Haiti's history as good versus evil stunts our capacity for moral judgment. Past suffering
does not guarantee future virtue. Only a distorted history is morally pure (Buck-Morss 138).

Long after the fateful and contested scene of new world reckoning inscribed at Bois Caiman, and after the first independent constitution of 1804, succeeding Emperor Jacques Dessalines, Baba Ogun in the mythic imagination and spiritual memory of the island’s actual past, declares publicly upon the world stage the liberty of Hayti and equality of all Haitians (as blacks, regardless of the color of their skin) within cosmic and universal parameters. What was it all about, then? A question the Haitian people and past must answer for our speculations upon the basis of that material history and spiritual being of that myth to appear in their reality through the veils of our illusions, assumptions and ignorance.

One of the best illustrations of divine unity in African vision expressed in a modern political document where the maxim history is myth would be the Haitian constitution of 1805 signed by Dessalines, or Baba Ogun, whereby all of Haiti is declared independent and forever abolishing slavery under its eternal sovereignty in the name of God and before all the beings in the created Universe. In the preamble of the second constitution of Haiti composed in 1805, the complex and extensive totality of this vision of the newly sovereign territory is expressed in theological, cosmic dimensions of a mythic, historical and personal totality by “Emperor Jacques I (Dessalines),” and his
We, H. Christophe, Clerveaux, Vernet, Gabart, Petion, Geffard, Toussaint, Brave, Raphael, Roamin, Lalondridie, Capoix, Magny, Daut, Conge, Magloire, Ambrose, Yayou, Jean Louis Franchois, Gerin, Mereau, Fervu, Bavelais, Martial Besse… As well in our name as in that of the people of Hayti, who have legally constituted us faithfully organs and interpreters of their will, in presence of the Supreme Being, before whom all mankind are equal, and who has scattered so many species of creatures on the surface of the earth for the purpose of manifesting his glory and his power by the diversity of his works, in the presence of all nature by whom we have been so unjustly and for so long a time considered as outcast children…Do declare: …

Art. 1. The people inhabiting the island formerly called St. Domingo, hereby agree to form themselves into a free state sovereign and independent of any other power in the universe, under the name of empire of Hayti; 2. Slavery is forever abolished; 3. The Citizens of Hayti are brothers at home; equality in the eyes of the law is incontestably acknowledged, and there cannot exist any titles, advantages, or privileges, other than those necessarily resulting from the consideration and reward of services rendered to liberty and independence; 4. The law is the same to all, whether it punishing, or whether it protects.

The articles that constitute the 1805 Haitian Declaration of Independence and the political formations that issue forth from the manifesto and its signing, collectively declared, affirmed and adopted by its signatories, are themselves enshrined in a proclamation of world-historical precedent and suggest a binding, cosmic reality henceforth (i.e., not “retroactive,” but perpetual) of Haitian independence “in the presence of the Supreme,” and before the gaze and claims of “any other power in the
universe.” Slavery was not only “forever abolished” within and by this empire by
proclamation of this law, but the revaluation of the economic logics of slavery society
were recapitulated, and reconstructed, envisaging wealth not as a measure of
accumulation of property and ownership, but as a measure of “reward [for] services
rendered to liberty and independence.”

The declaration was, like the documents that informally inaugurated the
insurgent quest and question of liberation, not new to its proclaimers, nor un-thought in
the history of the world – not the exception but the rule of the quilombismos that had
taken root hundreds of years prior throughout the Americas. Furthermore, in this
political, military, and economic event and document, harmonizing the African
civilizations’ culture and experience, technology and genius of the disparate origins and
languages, religions and tribes of the assembled “black Jacobins,” such offices of state
and the following articles that address these foundational concerns of nation-statehood,
emphatically and in no unclear terms, solidify their claims in an articulation of Tawhid,
Divine Oneness, reminiscent of the Qur’an’s language and style (as Solomon Burnette
has argued), and identify as Emperor one of the most mythologically and religiously
celebrated manifestations in modern history of the concept and career, the mystery and
power of “Baba Ogun.” The depth and complexity of African life world surfaces in the
new world instance of this document’s composition and emergence with glimmerings of
a world society of future islands equal and united in freedom and independence. These dreams of American fortune and destiny in such a direction and endeavor have no beginning or end in new world poetics of black letters. They do, however, have effects, outcome, and results that mobilize the ongoing passage across and through many rivers.

In meditating on influences, it could even be said that, like the works characterized by inclusion of Scriptural content and inspiration, like the self-defensive amulets and other creative materials of the Males, intended for or made with prayerful purposes, Machado’s sources and methods set up a forge and apothecary of protective medicines. These therapeutic and magical black letters, it might even be found by the avid or blurry-eyed student, seem to mimic at times the dispersive and recursive style of the Qur’an’s narrative project in segmentation, thematic repetition, polysemic digression, citation and supplementation of Abrahamic Scriptural narratives of ancient past, parable, admonishment, warning, and promise, accounting for more than the sum of their parts. If Gates has argued that the slave narratives in general and as a whole “enjoy [the] unique status as textual evidence of the self-consciousness of the ex-slave and as the formal basis upon which an entire narrative tradition has been constructed,” the irony of Ogun, shines through in the understatement of the genius of black writing and the cosmic becoming.
In 1896, Machado de Assis repeated the phrase "There are more things between heaven and earth than our vain philosophy dreams of" with respect to the unsolved theft of some dynamite:

Therefore, do not marvel that the dynamite is still unfound. There are more things between heaven and earth than our vain philosophy dreams of. This thought of Hamlet's is old but is not thereby lost. I don't ask of truths that they always have white hair, all truths will serve, even those with white and gray hair. Now if there are many things between heaven and earth, the dynamite might well be there. There is a lot, I admit, but the space is vast and abundant. How shall we fetch it that high? The police, even the English police, who are said to be the best equipped, do not yet possess airborne detectives."

Machado, “though he lies in no grave” remains underground. Whence so much irony. “Out of the air” more like out of the atmosphere! While remaining accessible, Machado's writing is at the same time so allusive and oracular that it is unusual to find a story without the hint of a premonition or a clue to a buried treasure. In this case, the old witch’s prescience is dystopian, but no less uncanny: drones truly now are some of the most relied upon detectives in the world with their airborne cameras. The key words that distinguish Machado’s prophecy from fantasy here are "not" and "yet," but the distance between those two states is immeasurable. Cross off from the list of unrealized Machadian prophecies the case of the Missing Machado: he is not a posthumous person, he is dynamite. “It was easier to catch in the light of day a thief of scarves who confronted the masses of people than the thieves who secretly stole more valuable
objects in the dark,” Silvo notes. “The between-worlds of Epicurus sheltered even stolen dynamite” (80). Machado is not a posthumous person so much as the dynamite of a stolen life "still unfound."

4.7 Harquebus Suite: “Quilomboje” or, the Black Press Now

Quilombo is a historical movement that takes place in the virtual time of the mythic which inserts itself into the social history of the Transatlantic making of the Americas. As Eliza Larkin Nascimento explains of an inveterate scholar and champion of Quilombo as concept and heritage, culture and patrimony of African descendants in Brazil:

Abdias do Nascimento [argues in] …O Quilombismo … that Africans in Brazil must develop their own liberation ideology, based on their own historical experience, not in order to separate themselves from the rest of Brazil, but to prepare to lead the nation, as its majority population, in a democratic context….Nascimento contends that African Brazilians created the first free republic in the Americas (long before Haiti). Palmares’ saga of a hundred years’ resistance to colonial siege by the Portuguese and the Dutch, from 1595 to 1696, is an example and a symbol to PanafriCanists the world over. Palmares was the highest expression of the Afro-Brazilian experience in building free communities called quilombos (hence Quilombismo). Nascimento builds his model of Afro-Brazilian resistance and social change from this historical experience” (Elisa Larkin Nascimento from Africans in Brazil; 65-6).

Machado’s takes on ways to think of and partake in quilombo are numerous, though there are several ways in which Illustrated Week historicizes, defends, chronicles,
and embodies the quilombo and quilomboisms, even the quilomboje of quilombo today.

In the following chapter we’ll look at the futuristic pedagogy envisioned by the black literati of Bahia and Rio from within and outside the quilombos of Brazil. But first, an even more distant vision and preparation in the midst of Quilombismo which is less of an ism and more of an abyss, less of a paradigm and more of a prism:

If I say that life is a meteor, the reader will think I’m going to write a column on philosophy, and I’m just here to report on the Meteor, an eight-page newspaper, with the headline: "Meteor displays no pretense toward duration". These six words are enough to show that it is a journal of spirit and sense. Generally, each sheet that appears promises at least three and a half centuries of existence, and a chronometric regularity. The Meteor does not promise to last, nor to appear on certain days. It will come when you can come. Varied, gracious, interesting, in some places, serious and even scientific, the Meteor let’s one read without effort or fuss. On the contrary, one laments that its is a meteoric and not a planetary future, at least that lasts as long as the planet on he and we inhabit. Planets, meteors, duration, all this brings to mind an idea of a modern French scholar. By calculations he made he came to be of the opinion that in ten thousand years there will be on earth a universal, or at least continental, deluge due to the displacement of the oceans, produced by the spinning of the planet. An epochal flood! What then will be made of the immortality of our works? Unless we put a copy of all the poets, musicians and artists into the ark. Oh! but what an arc that will be! If I didn’t fear such a hoot, I’d call it a harquebus (Machado de Assis, Fleiuss and Bocaiuva).
Black letters, what stationary meteor or dark star, holds the records of our immortality in the weightlessness of space, traveling light, in all of the writing of the omni arcades: the record, trace, and double mark of all these bookwomen and men of letters in the arche-(b)us floating upon the sea of eternity.
Now if you do this, you are skilled in writing. As for those wise writers from the time after the gods, they who foretold what was to come, their names have become everlasting, (even though) they have departed this life and all their relatives are forgotten. They did not make for themselves mausolea of copper with tombstones of iron; they did not think to leave heirs, children to proclaim their names: (rather) they made heirs of writings, of the teachings they had composed. They gave themselves [a book] as (their) lector-priest, a writing-board as (their) dutiful son. Teachings are their mausolea, the reed-pen (their) child, the burnishing-stone (their) wife. Both great and small are given (them) as their children, for the writer is chief. Their gates and mansions have been destroyed, their mortuary priests are [gone], their tombstones are covered with dirt, their tombs are forgotten. (But) their names are proclaimed on account of their books which they composed while they were alive. The memory of their authors is good: it is for eternity and forever....
5.1 Maritime News: Machado about Nothing

The evanescent appearances of the French caravel, the Orixa, mark the poetics of quotidian maritime news published in the daily newspapers of Pierre Plancher’s Jornal do Comercio and the Diario do Rio de Janeiro. Notwithstanding the nation of the ship’s registry, the commercial vessel’s name (the manifest of which would often be printed in this section of the paper reporting on the commercial activities, values and quantities of goods aboard said ships, whether of slaves, colonial dignitaries, European opera stars, or shipments of other sorts of commodities). The name of the vessel suggests a Yoruba connection and traces the transatlantic routes of “all the saints” (Santeria means, literally, way of the saints) and African descendants in diaspora. The Orixa was once spotted in transatlantic transit by a Portuguese fleet, noting its location at the time, which marks a territory in the North American literary imagination of that exact moment in history when Moby Dick was hunted in those waters.

---

According to the *Diário do Rio de Janeiro*, no 228, On August 23, 1828 there were “no official quotas to report; the park remained today in a state of great apathy; only a few shares were sold at the bank of Brazil.” There was “nothing of novelty” even in the following report: “Captain Pamplona Junior, of the Portuguese brigue Assombro, encountered the day before yesterday, on the 21st, coming from Lisbon at 8, the French galera *the Orixa*, in Lat 16 30' e Long. 30 28' O of Greenwich, en route from Marseilles to Salem. Nothing of novelty.” Aside from the irony of declaring in newsprint the absence of news, there was nothing unusual about this report, yet the fortuitous illustration of such a droll perception of the affairs of daily life in Rio de Janeiro before Machado’s birth, and the stories, essays, tales and poems that he would contribute to that newspaper serves well any arbitrarily chosen day to set the tone for the pre-Machadian universe of Rio de Janeiro. En route to meet his friend, the king, OBATALA sings in *The Imprisonment*: “Eshu confuser of men! When he is angry he hits a stone until it bleeds. Having thrown a stone today – he kills a bird of yesterday” (Ijimere and Beier 19).

As Maya Deren notes, in *Divine Horsemen*, a child’s spiritual inheritance is the accumulation of the social and material forces present at the time and under the conditions of their conception and birth; their personal guardians and destiny, their calling and capacity, are shaped by the total environment into which they are born. During the everyday life of nineteenth-century slavery society’s booming industry in the
months and years before and after Machado’s birth, the *Orixá* was still coming and going in the seas it shared with the *Assombro of Rio de Janeiro*, the *Lembrança* of Mahommah Baquaqua and the *Pequod* of Captain Ahab. As marked by redactor of the *Diario do Rio de Janeiro*, readers and patrons of the newspaper went about their mid-nineteenth-century business as usual; still busy buying and losing slaves, selling others, fathering, manumitting, and such, everything went on undisturbed. Until in 1839, something truly noteworthy happened, which the *Diario do Rio*, and everybody else in town seemed to sleep right through, all except the parents of the soon to be "Literary Glory of Brazil" (Bettencourt 238).

There is a Yoruba proverb that says “The largest fish is caught with the largest hook in the largest ocean.” The life work of Machado was born and immortalized in the heart of the blackest region and from the roots of the blackest city in the blackest nation of the New World. His childhood home situated in the neighborhood called “Little Africa” would signal the world-historical scale of the survivors of the grueling and inhuman passage that would mark the black arrivants as “new blacks.”

The first day of a Brazilian winter (but a North American summer)—June 21, 1839—brought life to a man of destiny: Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis. Like many great leaders before him, he was born in stark poverty. His body was not a strong one. Feeble and ugly, it had to fight a taint of epilepsy. But the light of a great soul made strength of its own for this poor son of a washerwoman and a house painter. He was to conquer the literary circles of his country; the echo of his talent would reach everywhere in Brazil. He would cross the frontiers of his own land to win the praise of Portuguese, French, Spanish, German, and English critics.
He lived with his parents in Livramento, a town near Rio de Janeiro. This name would have sounded like caustic irony to the little mulatto Joaquim Maria, under the bondage of so many afflictions, had he understood its meaning: "liberation." Liberation was precisely what he craved most and what the world so satanically denied him in those first years. Liberation from his humble birth, from his poverty, his ugliness, even from his stammering. …he recalled that during the day not even the simplest pleasures of youth were available to him, as they were to other children. True, he tried to join the boys in the neighborhood, playing on the hills or throwing stones at birds (Bettencourt 3).

Through the inspiration and technologies of the spirit of Iron, the National Typography that sailed on Noé’s ark to Rio de Janeiro from France, like the caravel the Orixá, black letters would make its way through the city of Machado’s birth, this African diasporic “skein of networks” – this black leviathan – whereby the freedmen and the still enslaved would harness the elements and energies of their own subjection in the service of universal liberation and the construction of the foundation of a harmonious cosmic civilization.

In his ground-breaking doctoral dissertation at Stanford, Antonio Olliz Boyd of The Concept of Black Esthetics as seen in Selected Works of … Machado de Assis, Nicolas Guillen and Adalberto Ortiz, comments, “since there has never been any doubt by critics as to their genetic affiliation, and persuasion,” the discussion of black aesthetics in Machado and his “attitude toward race, on the other hand, eludes his critics,” and requires special attention. His analysis would ultimately point to the confusion of the
critics and the compulsory erasure of African humanity from the intellectual representation of black life to date, when the thesis was published in 1975:

A study of the life and works of Machado de Assis exposes, in our opinion, the pattern of duplicity of Latin American racism, which has led readers and critics alike to misinterpret important esthetic tendencies in the non-white Latin American author. As explained in a theoretical approach to the study of literature: "A writer inevitably expresses his experience and total conception of life; but it would be manifestly untrue to say that he expresses the whole of life - or even the whole of life of a given time - completely." Thus, we consider it to be totally misleading and exhaustively, to consider Machado de Assis’ works to be the definitive picture of Brazilian life in mid and late nineteenth century Rio de Janeiro without considering the author’s personal interpretation of the scenes he witnessed. An author’s personal interpretation of society’s reality is per force a perspective sui generis (Boyd 32).

Boyd’s dissertation advances the concept of “black writing” to describe the extant body of writings and writers, and therefore movement and genre of literature in the Americas, in which the experience of African descent consciously informs? a text to partake in the generic registers of kinship and tradition, ancestrality and heritage that structure the coherences of other national, ethnic, or minor literatures.

Where do we find the writer who will testify in writing to the unspeakable horror of slavery, the debilitating violence, the moral debauchery of the logics engineering, engendering and indulging in the enslavement of black bodies, their subjection, enjoyment, abjection and erasure? Where else but in Little Africa, Rio de Janeiro, a bright star in a constellation of Afrotopias navigating colonial infernos. Boyd’s
analysis proceeds toward textual analysis of Machado’s fiction from the “personal” biographical, historical, and social conditions of the writer’s background and environment:

Machado de Assis was … the paternal grandson of freed slaves. His father, at birth, was listed as "pardo" or “colored.” Actually, according to Massa, a careful biographer of Machado, the only distinction to be noted between the classification black and colored was a social distinction. Freedom often meant the difference between one color indication or the other (Boyd 32).

Regardless of the ways in which the denomination of mulatto functioned in 19th century Brazil, it seems necessary to state the obvious in this context, that the racial classification pertained exclusively to people of African descent. Some sources, like Os Inimigos de Machado de Assis, argue that even Machado’s mother was of African descent, that she ("era negra") was “black” (Montello), from the Azores, but in any case, her being an immigrant woman married to a laboring African descendant of the freedmen, the class position of Machado’s parents was precarious and racialized in relation to the full-throttle flourishing of the slave trade and immigrant wealth installing itself still in Rio de Janeiro during the years of his youth. Machado’s childhood saw two general trends: the increasing frenzy and durée of the Transatlantic slave trade on one hand, enriching the opulent European colonial decadence, and on the other, his family members perishing one by one. “Brazil was the American society that received the
largest contingent of African slaves in the Americas and the longest-lasting slave regime in the Western Hemisphere” (Klein and Luna, 2010):

In 1872, the year of Brazil’s first national census, whites constituted 38.1 percent of the population, while blacks, mulattoes, and Indians accounted for the remaining 61.9 percent. In the second census, carried out in 1890, the white population, although it had proportionately increased by 5.9 percent to 44 percent, was still in the minority, as the other racial categories together still accounted for 56 percent of the total (Santos, 1997) (Santos, 2002, 61).

Ultimately the blackness of the “esthetics” in Machado’s writing would derive not from the mere fact of biological parentage, but from his being a writer born into African-descendant sociality and the daily contexts of play and survival, from the neighborhood of Little Africa, where he was born and whence he roamed through the city’s islands and quilombos, forests, and other theaters of cruelty, of escape, of repatriation.

Boyd observed that it had already long been “an established fact that Machado de Assis … had black slave forebears. Nonetheless, under the value system of the controlling white society, he became progressively white.” That is to say, over time, Machado’s blackness became less socially visible as such; in fact, it became so non-viable that only one fate could be left to him in Boyd’s understanding of the racial habitus of nineteenth-century Brazil, which would keep Machado under wraps in the twentieth: “Machado died a white man, as published in the Rio de Janeiro newspaper, Correio da
Manhã on September 30, 1908. White at death; mulatto at birth; colored throughout his life span” (Boyd, 40-41). Investigating the case of the missing Machado de Assis, the claim of his ancestry or ascent, reported in the paper the next day, one notes that the racial determination was an entry made by the mortician who signed his death certificate.

Machado died an aged man at 69 years – could it be that this simply confused the doctor unused to seeing African children live past their twenties? Or can we read this Machado in the morgue on September 30th as an apotheosis of Frantz Fanon’s maxim: “However painful it may be for me to accept this conclusion, I am obliged to state it: For the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white” (Fanon Black Skin, White Masks 4)? A pronouncement on so dark a matter, conveniently, can be found in the words of Mars in the year 1866, in his appearance in the publication – also by the Imperial Artistic Institute of Rio – of Machado’s third original drama The Gods in Suits.

\[\text{Man's tragedy, Nietzsche said, is that he was once a child. None the less, we cannot afford to forget that, as Charles Odier has shown us, the neurotic's fate remains in his own hands. However painful it may be for me to accept this conclusion, I am obliged to state it: For the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white.}\]
In the comedic drama, “in one act,” the Greco-Roman gods of old Olympus have been dethroned again by the Titans and have begun complaining about and yet taking something of a curious if not aspirational interest in the narrative arc of human affairs. In the midst of their distanced evaluation of the baffling human condition, humorous and pithy anecdotes pour forth from the deflated yet incorrigible ancient ones. Mars, ever the god of war observes however, with awe, the Janus-faced duplicity of human conflict and conceit:

It’s a crying shame, the way of the world today. Warfare, my personal craft, is now taken as the last resort, having been replaced by artifice. The name of the new game is diplomacy: a mutual deceit. Slowly killing themselves through an insane labor; they waste their time, cares and talent arguing; their efforts amounting to tricks and ruses. If something is felt by all to be black, it will be said to be white: they think it’s heresy to close the case and set it right. If I wish to mention, for example, this cat, to say the word should be enough. But, no. One must use diplomacy. One must begin to riddle and bluff, speaking of a house pet, black or white, and without a leash, without a mane or wings that walks on four little feet. You see? The haters all weigh in: "The animal is well-known. It’s a cat.” “No sir,” says another, “It’s a dog” (Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis The Gods in Suits: A Comedy).

In the logic of Machado’s Martian analysis of the double-speak of the proverbial ‘cordial man’ of Brazilian society, Machado’s reading against the grain of the discourse of his day, seeing through the hypocrisy of the proverbial “cordial Brazilian” the departure from morality through the formal and quotidian injunctions of racial license in colonial empire. If the papers of his day printed that he’s white, he must have been born a black man. Even if he was also born blue. Is it more to the point of proving the
Jamaican proverb, “No one black dies a natural death?” (Cliff). If Machado’s memory was beset by complications after the fact owing to a white lie typed upon his death certificate, his life-writing would become an eternal touché of the revenant to come back:

And, because it coordinates the future in the past, the ghost is not only a revenant (a returner, the French for “ghost”), but also an arrivant, one who arrives. In Aporias, a text of the same period as Specters, Derrida writes, “The absolute arrivant does not yet have a name or an identity. It is not an invader or an occupier, nor is it a colonizer, though it can become one. This is why I call it simply the arrivant, and not someone or something that arrives, a subject, a person, an individual, a living thing, even less one of the migrants I just mentioned” [Aporias 34]. Yet since, in deconstruction, narrow and general senses have always bled into each other, concepts embraced metaphors and vice versa, Derrida has no difficulty comparing Marx at the end of his book to “a clandestine immigrant [whom one] should not rush to make . . . an illegal alien or . . . neutralize him through naturalization” (Chakravorty Spivak 71).

5.2 MachaDOOM: Meta(l) Faced Moleque

Just as a child’s physical body inevitably is issue of the physical component of his parents, so his loa are his psychic inheritance and they carry forward, into his contemporary gros-bon-ange, the moral accumulation of the race. … This automatic inheritance is not at all contradicted by the apparent power of discrimination and selection implied in the phrase … the character of a person is the character of his loa…. If the original families were each distinguished by certain of the major loa, intermarriage has, by now, introduced all the major loa into all the family lines and all major
loa-principles are latent in everyone. The reference to the sympathetic relationship between the character of a person and that of his loa relates to the maite-tete, the 'master of the head,' or the loa which is dominant above all others in the psyche of an individual…”

- Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen*

The ghostly in Hamletian, chthonic, and historico-political terms as embodied by the spirit of critique, of poetry, philosophy, and the photographic apparatus all bend the pitch of Machado’s writerly vocation and technical realization toward the figurations and manifestations of the mythic, medicinal, and monumental figure of Ogun, the Orisa of martial, metamorphic, and metallurgic arts. Although only a faint trace of the critical literary introduction to Ogun, which is needed and occasioned by the network and apparatus of black writing, can be glanced here, the consideration of this mythic figure and thethetic and non-theletic apparatuses it gathers are poetically captured in Machado’s imagination as abundantly expressed in the *Illustrated Weekly.*
Enunciating the locus and activity of their own publication through the reflective satirical gesture of an (n)autobiographical caricature, the *mise en scène* depicts a moment of rupture interrupted, a moment of creation and making at the most material and allegorical, mythical and poetic levels. Building, dwelling, and thinking on topics of concern to himself and the nation, the Moleque is found in this tableau working late into the midnight hour pounding away on an anvil in the process of crafting what appear to be medieval heavy grade pieces of a full set of armor.

In the illustration and caption (Figure 12), Dr. Semana has just burst in upon this anomalous and clamorous scene in which sparks are flying and armor shining in ways that bring out the punctum of the *Illustrated Weekly* as just this sort of recombinatory method of piercing discourse and punching through the lines in which a reader might fail to read with boldfaced script broken loose and stolen free from the cryptogram of oppression that is a language unmoored from action, a discourse incapable of taking itself up as armament and shield.
Figure 15: Meta(l) Masque: Machado’s ‘Martelladas’

The caption is itself an intricate and esoteric puzzle, yet its main meanings ring true even in translation. The scene of subjection that is slavery is here interrupted by the preparations of the ostensibly enslaved which by their poetic accompaniment of Machado’s text portend a metaphysical and spiritual warfare fought in the life of the mind by means of the pen and the press, newfangled figurations of shield and sword: “What are you doing here, Moleque, you old devil, to be making such a racket in my eardrums at his hour with your martelladas [clanging hammer-strikes],” quips an obviously exasperated Dr. Semana barging in on the Moleque’s forge, catching him red
handed. Boisterously declaring himself while remaining engaged on that task at hand, the Moleque’s response is a fragment of the Machadian manifesto already in print and in spiritual motion: “I’m forging a testa de ferro....” In the italicized Portuguese left untranslated, the Moleque launches a multi-valent pun that breaks down into at least two main meanings.

First, the most obvious register is the way the words separately mean a visage of iron or an iron mask, but also as a phrase, the words testa de ferro mean an alias, scandal, smokescreen, or a ruse. Quite literally, a meta(l) masque: “I’m forging a testa de ferro, you see, masa, now that I’ve begun writing about politics I’ve had to start watching my back because of the police – so, not wanting to take any chances, I’m not just making the testa [face], but the whole suit” (italics mine) (Machado de Assis, Fleiuss and Bocaiuva). He’s gone and put on an iron shirt!

The Moleque, also to be known as the face behind and of the iron mask being forged, and his representation in this comic suggest vast and ranging layers of mythic and hermetic wisdom relating the ancient forge of Promethean invention and discovery to the fate and history of writing, to the black press, and to the Machadian oeuvre and milieu. This autobiographical fiction in the foreground (front page) of the Illustrated Weekly joyfully expresses the vehemence of a calling and devotion that one can make out perhaps most clearly, as the caption informs us, rocking out in fugitive planning; ‘round
midnight. This latter clue about the rousing and travelling echo of the heavy heartbeat of black letters’ hammer ringing all over this land can help us to think about Fred Moten’s “New International of Rhythmic Feeling(s)” (Moten Black and Blur) in relation to a Lusophone archive rooted in African musical purposes and language practices.

5.3 (x) Angola Lucida: Reading of the Future in the Colors of Utopia

Utopia is blocked off by possibility, never by immediate reality; this is why it seems abstract in the midst of extant things. The inextinguishable color comes from nonbeing. Thought is its servant, a piece of existence extending—however negatively—to that which is not. The utmost distance alone would be proximity; philosophy is the prism in which its color is caught.

- Adorno, Negative Dialectics
Figure 15: “No, sir, you’re mistaken. She is Angola.”

In the image above (Figure 15), a black and white cartoon published in the *Illustrated Weekly*, two foregrounded speakers are shown with a third figure, standing behind the seated figures, raises outstretched arms, as if gesturing communication. The caption, however, only has two speaking parts. This third figure’s presence, discussed by the seated pair, suggests a sonic dimension of action captured in the frame of the illustration that emits a silence. The man in the *mise en scene* comments to the woman seated next to him:

“-Your slave is a veritable somnambulist, my lady. Just look at how lucid she is!”
“- No, sir, you’re wrong [está enganado]. She’s [from] Angola.”

Shocking in the deadpan combination of entrenched signs of racial violence within a tight frame, this tragic “comic” lashes out at the stupidity of colorism and illustrates the dehumanizing drama of everyday life, domestic and national, under the sign of slavery. It engenders comic relief, but provides no comforts.

Though confrontational in its overt rehearsal of dehumanizing codes of Brazilian racecraft and racial subjection, a subtle affirmation and scandalous overturning is performed in the joke’s silent operation as poem. Considering the source and the medium itself as by default satirical in the Illustrated Weekly, this representation should not be read as an ad hominem attack, at least not in the manner of being ultimately at the expense of the black woman’s representation or idea. In the cartoon the speakers are depicted as seated, while the object of their discussion stands (overhearing), with arms outstretched if not uplifted – as if communicating in a higher register or to a further audience. Her words, if she speaks in the imagined dramaturgy of the frame, are not

\footnote{“A sua escrava é uma verdadeira somnambula, minha senhora. Vê como esta lucida? - Não, senhor, está enganado. Ela é Angola.”}
rendered by Machado’s caption to the illustration by Heinrich Fleiuss, lending a sonic
dimension of silence to her enframed actions left to conjecture.

African persons, stolen life that first became African by being stolen from Africa,
were popularly referred to in newspaper ads and slave auctions posted on billboards
and out in the open-air markets, and on corners and in the middle of the street. These
noble, royal, and divine descendants, illustrious and il/literate beyond our ken were
known only by their ascribed “nation” or perceived ethnic group, but the posthumous
personare persist in the resistance to the statuses of objects and things of which all things
are capable. This unspeakable and unspoken element of Brazilian life centered in the
home, at the jugular of the cultural consciousness, in the abuse and captivity of the black
woman, consist in a violation of personhood as universal as it is cosmic. Such grizzly
workings of slavery so depicted and revealed in the tragi-comic image-text present
textual experiences that are blatantly painful with a spoonful of some kind of medicine it
is difficult to qualify or define. If it is unsettling to laugh at scenes of quotidian domestic
violence and racial slavery and jokes and puns centered around normalized cultures of
abuse and neglect of personhood and inner riches, then the captivity and status as
property of the African woman are clearly no laughing matter. Riendo castigat mores – the
motto of the Illustrated Weekly – suggests the humor turns the joke’s punchline on the
reader; castigating.
In the way “image + text” (Marassa) combines and assembles a battery of entrenched signs and symbolic formations of racecraft, the racial violence within a tight frame, at once confrontational, subtle, scandalous, daring, crude becomes itself an object of black humor, recognition, identification, satire, and critique: riendo castigat mores. In this racist joke or signifying inversion of the genre, the two seated interlocutors are the only of the three figures to be “given lines” from both the artists – Heinrich Fleiuss draws them, Machado invents or ultimately decides a collectively designed text – which bespeaks two angles of misrecognition; the man inquires if the black woman is sleepwalking, confusing her blackness perhaps with nocturnal movement, “lucid” while asleep – walking while black. This racist attitude is the one that takes surprise at any and all agency of the supposedly other. The man is “mistaken” or “deceived” by his own reason, the racist delirium of his own observation; according to the seated woman, the slave owner, mistress (senhora), she cannot be “lucid” any more than she can be sleepwalking because lucidity which means light, clarity, and intelligence is officially white, the opposite of African and in conflict with her origin, which doubles as her being – the genitive (Angolan) is not used to refer to her, but rather the noun (as an adjective would presumably connote a humanity the speaker wished to deny the subject of her rejoinder): she is Angola.
The equivocation between abstract nouns somnambulist and Angola run through the plurality of meanings of “lucida” by way of negation (“Não,”) and the deceitfulness of appearances in the inverted image of colonial society (“senhor, está enganado”). The first in the series of ruptures here illustrated in one comic frame is the obvious and unspoken first violence of slavery in the negation of the African other represented not just by the language the man uses to refer to her (“sua escrava”, “your slave”) but also, by speaking about her in the distancing third person, it sets up the social schema of Brazilian slavery society, which requires her presence to be placed under erasure in order for the domestic space to appear.

The equivocation between abstract nouns somnambulist and Angola run through the plurality of meanings of “lucida” by way of negation (“não”) and deceit (“senhor, está enganado”). The first of the ruptures here illustrated in a single illustrated frame presents the obvious and unspoken initial violence of slavery’s negation of the African person othered by means of representation (the man refers to her as “your slave”) in the distancing third person. The black woman’s domestic captivity under erasure, structured a priori as an object, type, form of labor or enjoyment, anxiety or production, excludes her from the social and linguistic apparatus her presence founds. The silence to which she is induced by discursive mediation, here graphically illustrated, an invisible apparatus of her character’s restless disappearance as image into
a background haunts the historicity of the tragical comic. The light and movement, silence and gesture that flash in the fiction in frame exemplify the dialectical resonance of black letters that surprise the imposed laws of colonial reason and haunt the reading of all texts with an insurgent ghost of the Angola lucida – the black woman reader. The double marking of the African presence amidst white slavery society – both anonymous and spectacular (there are no proper names in the comic except for that region of Congo mentioned to stand in for an ontological, social, and personal index)—“she is Angola.” “If [she] didn’t exist [she] would have to be invented” (Spillers) in order for Brazil to exist at all.

To be present without being party to address as a reciprocal interlocutor. Excluded from the social and linguistic apparatus, the silence to which (x)Angola Lucida is subjected and introduced in the tragi-comic scene is a discursive and mediated intervention, an invisible extension of her unseen refusal to disappear or fall from consciousness. Whether her name is Angola or Peaches, America or La Negresse of the Illustrated Weekly, hers is the movement image; portrait as background.
Figure 16: Coincidences: “PHOTOGRAPHO -Assim...quando eu abrir isto, você olhe para dentro do vidro. – Agora...um, dois, três, quatro...”

In Figure 16 the spectator of the Illustrated Weekly views a movement image, a movement of capture interrupted. Girl interruption. The ruptures here are several and subjective – which is to say, a matter of opinion, perspective, imagination, affect. The black woman, dressed in white, a hat or turban upon her head, appears in the style of the “Bahiana,” the notably dignified African women of Bahia having the custom of this representation’s habit. The mise en scene is consistent across the two images depicting the same figures, the Bahiana and a “Photographer,” the only character in the short drama with lines, composed, we can say with confidence, by Machado. The camera man
speaks, in fact, only in instructions; rudely, without formal address: “Look... when I open this, you look inside the glass.” In the next frame a caption continues these instructions: “Okay, now... one, two, three, four...” While the photographer “takes” the long exposure photograph, which would have required the subject to sit motionless before the “glass” lens for far more than four seconds, the subject in frame rises and interrupts the recording mechanism by performing the instructions as received and looking, as the case may uncannily be, directly into the source and apparatus of the camera. Talk about returning the male gaze – and without wasting a breath.

The photographic occasion is ruptured in a botched portrait attempt when a misreading takes place that might as well be a refusal, an interruption, an intervention: each of these, reducible only to questionings; resolution, agency, gaze, capture – themselves questioned and redirected, a dissident turn from the quotidian violence of racial domination normalized by polite society. Both the negated origin and persistence of “African humanity” and the diasporic abyss of omnipresent sites of dehumanizing subjection and non-belonging imagine the enslaved African as a zombie; the violence of subjection sublimated to a rationale of ontological difference; the racially contested photographic subject-object of the gaze peers through the aperture of enframement, the somnambulist kidnapped from Angola was also robbed of lucidity, she was the photographic negative presence. The dialectical image of the black writer emerges from
the combined traces of erasure and marks of gendered difference through which person
is transfigured into representational object of subjection and desire, abjection and
sublimation. Of the black body as somnambulist, a chilling invocation in the sorcery of
color, the image of racist discourse and masculine violence turns the African woman
into a domestic spectacle, projecting an invention of animal and alien conditions.

The single frame capturing an image of the black life in exile, the Brazilian
imitation of enlightenment humanism, reviews and intervenes in the Brazilian
capitulation to the assumption of Hegelian notions of the subject organizing sovereignty
through binaries appropriations, by way of possession, and transcendence:

Descriptions of cultural, racial, and physical differences that note “Otherness” but
remain free of categories of worth or rank are difficult to come by. Many, if not
most, textual / literary descriptions of race range from the sly, the nuanced, to the
pseudo-scientifically “proven.” And all have justifications and claims of accuracy
in order to sustain dominance. …One has only to read the eugenics of the Southern
physician and slaveholder Samuel Cartwright to understand the lengths to which
science, if not politics, can go in documenting the need for control of the Other.
“According to unalterable physiological laws,” he writes in his “Report on the
Diseases and Physical Peculiarities of the Negro Race” (1851), “negroes, as a
general rule, to which there are but few exceptions, can only have their intellectual
faculties awakened in a sufficient degree to receive moral culture, and to profit by
religious or other instruction, when under the compulsory authority of the white
man…. From their natural indolence, unless under the stimulus of compulsion,
they doze away their lives with the capacity of their lungs for atmospheric air only
half expanded, from the want of exercise…. The black blood distributed to the
brain chains the mind to ignorance, superstition and barbarism, and bolts the door
against civilization, moral culture and religious truth.” Dr. Cartwright pointed to
two illnesses, one of which he labeled “drapetomania, or the disease causing slaves
to run away.” The other illness he diagnosed as “dysaesthesia aethiopica”— a kind
of mental lethargy that caused the negro “to be like a person half asleep” (what
slavesholders more commonly identified as “rascality”) (Morrison Kindle Edition 3-5).

Though this commonplace example of illustration and satirical comedy in the *Illustrated Weekly* reveals explicit engagements with racial discourse and its violence, this “confrontation” of the zones of otherness at the site of everyday life in exile in the Americas and the figuration of fugitivity and masquerade required to survive for persons of color in Brazilian society confronts not only an historical but a contemporary reality. As Morrison continues,

One purpose of scientific racism is to identify an outsider in order to define one’s self. Another possibility is to maintain (even enjoy) one’s own difference without contempt for the categorized difference of the Othered. Literature is especially and obviously revelatory in exposing / contemplating the definition of self whether it condemns or supports the means by which it is acquired. How does one become a racist, a sexist? Since no one is born a racist and there is no fetal predisposition to sexism, one learns Othering not by lecture or instruction but by example. It was probably universally clear— to sellers as well as the sold— that slavery was an inhuman, though profitable, condition. The sellers certainly didn’t want to be enslaved; the purchased often committed suicide to avoid it. So how did it work? One of the ways nations could accommodate slavery’s degradation was by brute force; another was to romance it (Morrison).

Superficially portrayed as a cosmetic ornament to the nation, its own lifeblood and inspired vision have enriched to overflowing, black letters in the time and environment of slavery society are arranged and deranged around a domestic locus in which the presence of the human in their heart and soul its alienated and objectified into
labor and the objects of pleasure and enjoyment, rather than cherished and assisted in
their labor.

Notes, colors, and forms are not signs. They refer to nothing exterior to themselves. To be sure, it is quite impossible to reduce them strictly to themselves, and the idea of a pure sound, for example, is an abstraction. As Merleau-Ponty has pointed out in The Phenomenology of Perception, there is no quality of sensation so bare that it is not penetrated with signification. But the dim little meaning which dwells within it, a light joy, a timid sadness, remains immanent or trembles about it like a heat mist; it is color or sound (Sartre 8).

Consigned in the colonial imagination to primordial, because ‘primitive’
consciousness still harboring from the mists of creation superstitious acts and magical
thinking; imagination run ‘wild,’ primitive spirit, the phenomenological and scientific
fact of black life matters beyond enframing of history, culture, and representation. Like
the hidden treasure, if she didn’t exist she would have to have been invented:

The Black Man, a sign in excess of all signs and therefore fundamentally unrepresentable, was the ideal example of this other-being, powerfully possessed by emptiness, for whom the negative had ended up penetrating all moments of existence—the death of the day, destruction and peril, the unnamable night of the world. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel described such figures as statues without language or awareness of themselves, human entities incapable of ridding themselves definitively of the animal presence with which they were mixed. In fact, their nature was to contain what was already dead. Such figures, he wrote, were the province of “a host of separate, antagonistic national Spirits who hate and fight each other to the death,” dismembering and destroying themselves like animals—a kind of humanity staggering through life, confusing becoming-human and becoming-animal, and all along “unconscious of their universality.”7 Others, more charitable, admitted that such entities were not completely devoid of humanity. They were, rather, in a state of slumber and had not yet become engaged in the adventure of what Paul Valéry called the “leap of no return.” It
was possible, they claimed, to raise them up to our level, and shouldering that burden did not grant the right to take advantage of their inferiority. On the contrary, it was Europe’s duty to help and protect them. This made the colonial enterprise a fundamentally “civilizing” and “humanitarian” enterprise. The violence that was its corollary could only ever be moral (Mbembe).

The Angolan port city of Luanda connects the US, Haiti, Brazil in a Caribbean flow of peoples whose ancestral traces and descendant remains intercede in the continental interstices of empire to dissolve and redistribute power and memory, to parse and parry the unilateral conventions of colonial culture. In the Afro-Brazilian imaginaire and language of Umbanda, the Afro-Brazilian religion, Luanda becomes, in Afterlife and spiritual immanence, both a utopia and a reality, a destiny and a cause: Aruanda, the Olympus of African spirits once might say. Aruanda as a place of ancestral union and communion, then, relates exactly to the environment of the Machadiana from the reckoning and recollection of his earliest pieces. His first writings being eulogies for his late infant sister, and still, poems for his mother – each of these departed years prior to his publishing activity, their priority as subjects of writing and publication takes on great significance. Black writing accompanies the revelation of African diaspora. Here myth is not merely tall tale, as we sometimes think of the word, as something to be debunked or disproven. For the black reader, myth is not a lie, but ‘a [way of] life’:

“reading Douglass’s slave narrative according to the project of canon formation, it is
discovered that the problems of writing an authentic history of culture are fundamentally problems of reading” (Judy, 105):

Douglass’s contemplation of the dilemma of literacy makes pronounced the thoroughly historical nature of every act of reading, i.e., the constitutive function of the reader as a guarantor of social institutions. Reading itself is betrayed as a social institution, whose stakes are in nothing less than the preservation of cultural authority. By making that authority indeterminate, the reader of Douglass’s narrative, who is identified with its narrative voice, delocalizes the production of meaning, so that it is no longer sited or cited in the text as an effect of determinate authorial expression. … In the figure of the [black] reader the concept of literature is produced as a historical moment, and in that moment of historical production it becomes possible to discern the institutional processes by which the reader is identified with the translating of indeterminate phenomena into ideas, of nature into culture (Judy, 106).

Maya Angelou said that for her as a child reading Shakespeare, she could so relate to the profound works of beauty and pathos in her own way that she was certain the writer was a black woman, if not a black girl; that was what she knew when she read him. Where the reader stands in place of the writer, as Machado’s narrators invite us to do, the black reader becomes someone new in a moment of ruptured encounter:

Authors too are historical. And that is precisely the reason why some of them want to escape from history by a leap into eternity. The book, serving as a go-between, establishes a historical contact among the men who are steeped in the same history and who likewise contribute to its making. Writing and reading are two facets of the same historical fact, and the freedom to which the writer invites us is not a pure abstract consciousness of being free. Strictly speaking, it is not; it wins itself in a historical situation; each book proposes a concrete liberation on the basis of a particular alienation. …It is this familiar world which the writer animates and penetrates with his freedom. It is on the basis of this world that the reader must bring about his concrete liberation; it is alienation, situation, and history. It is this
world which I must change or preserve for myself and others. ... And since the freedoms of the author and reader seek and affect each other through a world, it can just as well be said that the author’s choice of a certain aspect of the world determines the reader and, vice-versa, that it is by choosing his reader that the author decides upon his subject (Sartre 70).

The techniques of a reading that project an author and an addressee toward a reciprocal destiny call to mind the collaboration between Mahommah Baquaqua and the editor of his autobiography; the notion of collective authorship, ghost writing and other forms of multi-person invention inherent in the circulation and production of black letters. Yet, this very self-consciousness of authorship as a personal property in evidence, at the very least, of one’s capacity for citizenship, argued as a claim to the possession of those rights, went beyond the imagination or necessity of such claims; for citizenship, as evidenced no less in the second constitution of Haiti, in the worldview of many self-liberating communities of Africans and their descendants and kin, was a cosmological right and ontological privilege.

The vision of that society sought to promote kinship with a utopian social space of justice and equity quite in line with the values of Machado’s imaginaire as captured in the figures of the Illustrated Week and its production. Dr. Semana and Moleque are characters essentially written by Machado, and drawn by Henrique Fleiuss, but the Moleque as a character does harmonize and aggregate tropes of the so-called and many named “signifying monkey,” Elegbara, Exu, etc., that draw from a cosmology

213
suggesting the concept, complex for Western thinkers accustomed to receiving representations of the African, the primitive, the indigenous and the native as simplistic, dichotomous, primal, and intuitive may fail to notice the resistance of the object, the in(ner)dependence of the black sign. The chronological process of the emergence of the institute having everything to do with the accompanying text of the ‘jes grew’ that had played in the archives and spilled out of the margins of the publications of Paula Brito, O Espelho, and Homem de Cor, onto or beneath the stage of world literature’s history.

Compiler of the twentieth century, as you page through the collection of the News and Gazette (Gazeta de Notícias) from the year of grace 1894, and happen upon these lines, don’t read ahead without acknowledging what observations I made. Whether you reckon of its value a single red cent, or grant it any significance, it would please my soul to know that someone from the year 1944 paid however much attention to an old chronicle of half a century ago. And should you take such piety to the point of writing in some book or magazine: "A writer of the nineteenth century found a case of local color which does not seem devoid of interest …," if you do this, you will increase the emphasis of the French soldier’s song: "du haut du ciel – ta dernière demeure – Mon colonel, tu dois être content”. Yes, my young
captain, I will be content, and hereby bless you, compiler of the twentieth century.

- Machado de Assis

Is it ironic that Machado wrote to a future reader who could have only completed his task or become a compiler of the twentieth century in the first place, and that this reader would not have therefore been born for another hundred and six years – give or take – from the time Machado issued this extraordinary request (on August 19, 1894 in the *Gazette da noticias*)? Yes and no. Of course, Machado’s math was not off, but frankly, it is unclear as to whether any scholarship from the 1940s has taken up reflection, or translators urgently shared with the world his comical and critical entry on that day. The reader who will earn the fate (and title) of “young captain” will share with me a reward promised by a “writer of the nineteenth century” who is himself the case in point of local color I – and, if I haven’t got this wrong – he is talking about. Just check out his observations on that day in the cronica in which he makes this open ended and perpetual request to and invitation from the posthumous.

Such clowning around had gone on since his earliest days as editor and ghostwriter of the *Illustrated Weekly*. In the illustration from the same publication, in a series that ran periodically throughout the 1860s and 70s, called “Olympo Brasileiro” or “Brazilian Olympus,” the Moleque of the *Semana* seems to stand out in his element as trickster figure, blending in with the ancient African presence in the royal court as
oracle, and jester, calling upon the signifying monkey’s talisman and likeness in the figure of Elegbara, Esu, the kid’s quintessence stands in the livery of black performance which seeks a human referent and author.

Figure 17 O Moleque of the Illustrated Week decides to “take the liberty of dressing up like God-Momo” – since “no one else would take the part”.

The aesthetic and concept captured in the theme of Brazilian Olympus as published in the *Illustrated Weekly (Semana Illustrada)* reflected a conversation among an intergenerational circuit of voluntary associates engaged in serious critical thinking and experimentation with questions not only of representation and performance but of descent, inheritance, and dissemination. The spirit of this gesture is, like the Artistic Institute, certainly multiple, yet one of the aspects of the mythological invocation as
serialized in the *Semana* is the cultural and mythological inspiration of speculative
courtship, engagement, or even marriage to muses of some ancient provenance.

Everything about Machado’s imaginary, literary, and poetic embodiment of the
“ancient” Greek, Yoruba, Roman, Bantu, and other myths resonates with an experience
and theory of the posthumous his work is constantly rehearsing in ways that appear
directed, thriving, and unfolding still. Countless examples could be given of the ways in
which mythic heroes and anti-heroes have become the mainstay of media entertainment,
again, in the 21s century, in a way specifically engaged with and aided by technology.
As a matter of coincidence between science and literature in the common era, it is
instructive to relate the advanced technologies and charted limits of the scientific
imagination in the twenty first century with the visions, secrets, and puzzles of
prophetic poets in the centuries prior. It is just such a retrospective reflection that
constitutes the imaginative horizon of invention and the instrumentalization of
technology in the spirit of a cosmic going forth into knowledge held sacred even in
polite secular company.

In his introduction to the DVD version of *Mythodea: Music for NASA Mission: 2001
Mars Odyssey* by Vangelis (performed at the Temple of Zeus by himself, as well as the
celestial Kathleen Battle and Jessye Norman to the accompaniment of the London
Metropolitan Orchestra, National Opera of Greece Choir, and Seiston & Typana
Percussion Ensembles), NASA Astrophysicist Scott Bolton eloquently states his employer’s vision for the logical coherence of a collaborative project of such scale between arts and science, music and space exploration:

In ancient Greece, scientists, musicians, philosophers, and artists all worked together to understand nature and the universe. This approach has great advantages and is something we need to emulate more today. ...People from every culture and nationality probe the same fundamental questions: who are we? Where do we come from? How do we fit in the universe? Through Mythodea, Vangelis has offered us a science of Mars exploration more approachable and more understandable. Interestingly, art, music, and science cross all bounds of religion, culture, and nationality. Exploration of space represents one of the best examples of the ancient Greek spirit in action today. Only through international cooperation as embodied in the Greek Olympics can we successfully probe these fundamental questions and meet humanity’s greatest challenges (Vangelis et al.).

Yet, as we will see of Machado’s dalliance with or courtship of the muse, such ambitions have little if anything to do with rationalizing missions to the moon if we can’t feed our own citizens. Machado’s Afroturism was not a posture in relation to a market that stripped the black reader of her soul and personhood in order to distribute as goods the coherence of a destiny. Rather, the technology of the spirit of iron, or the mission to commune with and dramatically stage Mars, was Shakespearean in its responsiveness to tradition, mystery, and devotion to craft, to medicine, and to transformation of the illusion of reality by the living truths of the abyss of history:

Definition of "Phantasmagoria"

The name by which a thing or person is known.
This definition, for its clarity and conciseness, is worthy of being included in any of the most erudite national grammar books. For - *phantasmagoria* – is the name that makes known something; and this thing is, in the opinion of the learned, a spectacle, in which, by optical means, images and figures are made visible in a perfect illusion.

What’s this all about, anyway, you ask? Here’s the answer: Brazil is the land of phantasmagorias; everything therein is done illusorily.

When public opinion cries out against an abuse, it asks for a reform, or it points to a momentous need, then the fantastic spectacle begins, always the same, but also always perfect as illusion.

And the people and the press believe, they are silent and they wait.

Long, immense would be the enumeration of phantasmagorias. Just let them slip by the beak of the feather quill onto the paper, easily, without effort of memory.

Like this: Discussions about the construction of a new lyrical theater are underway (Machado de Assis, Fleuiss and Bocaiuva).  

5.4 A Good Example

Despite all the jokes and humor of the satirical zine, its content appears to be taken quite seriously by its authors. Here I am only drawing on known or suspected contributions to the periodical by Machado, though a good number of other serial contributors accumulated a body of work over the years in that same source entirely

\[5\] *(Semana Illustrada, September 21, 1862, P 736).*
worthy of study, translation, and exploration. If a good example is something to be followed, an entry in the Illustrated Week provides what is in my opinion one of the best possible examples of the pedagogy of the posthumous Machado’s concerns and connections revolved around; not just in theory, but in action, not just in talk but in print. Please play along and pay very close attention. Though there’s a joke in here somewhere, the punchline is predictably toward the end. Like the cartoons above, the realities they make light of are dark as night and bright beyond the reckoning of genius:

“A good example”

A wonderful example comes from Bahia. The case revolves around the question of emancipating the slaves. It is good policy to instruct the freedmen, so that the next generation does not have to see itself in the arms of terrible calamities.

A handful of students of that city [Salvador, BA] have decided to found a Club of Letters, whose special aims are to:

- Create a library for the collection of works in science and literature;
- Hire a qualified teacher to teach vernacular language in night schools for adults and for all freed students;
- Provide education to the enslaved;

---

8 “Um Bom Exemplo. Vem da Bahia um bom exemplo. Agora que se trata de emancipar os escravos, é de boa política instruir os libertos, de maneira que a próxima geração não tenha de se ver a braços com terríveis calamidades. ...Até lá não passarão estas cousas de simples metáforas e recursos de estilo ou mais concisamente: ‘words, words, words’ (the original English text of Hamlet, quoted in issue no. 551 of Semana Illustrada, June 2, 1871).
- Employ a philosophy teacher who will transmit to the students of the schools the basic idea of morals.

It is desired that this example should find imitators throughout Brazil. Nothing better could be done in the present for the future. It is likely, however, that some superficial souls lack comprehension of the advantages or the dangers to which we refer. The United States of America holds the most eloquent rejoinder.

The report from Mr. Hippeau, sent by the French Government to the U.S.A. requesting to study the public education system has just been released from the National Typography, and which the Imperial government has seen fit to translate and print. One reads in this text the zeal and intelligence with which the government and the people of the United States treat the instruction of the emancipated, not just to make them capable citizens, but also because to prevent them learning could result in their causing some disaster to the republic out of such ignorance.

The government clearly agreed to publish the book of Mr. Hippeau, which is a comprehensive and meticulous study of what is considered worthy of instruction by Washington. When we have the fourth part of that study, we can say with some truth that we have both representative government and public opinion. Until then, these things will pass as simple metaphors and resources of style, or more concisely: words, words, words (Machado de Assis, Fleiuss and Bocaiuva).

Machado de Assis, as Dr. Semana, issues in this cronica of the Illustrated Week, a completely unveiled and clearly articulated manifesto and pedagogy for the oppressed. I have no more words. The last words of the essay, however, in italics, aren’t even Dr. Semana’s or Machado’s; they’re citing Shakespeare—Hamlet, to be exact. The italics, however, are a Machadian addition preserved here (in my translation above).
Figure 18: “A GOOD SLAVE SPOILED: These are the consequences of teaching the black boys to read and write; they become keepers and confidents of all of our secrets!”

In the Afro-Brazilian imaginaire and language of Umbanda, the Afro-Brazilian religion, Luanda becomes Aruanda as abiding afterlife, an enfolding spiritual immanence extending from inheritance. Both a utopian horizon and reflection upon the

---

7 *Semana Ilustrada*, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, February 1, 1872. no. 584.
8 “Umbanda believes that there is only one God. His names are Zambi (Bantu) or Olorum (Yoruban). This God created the world and handed its government over to Obatala, Oshala, and Ifa-the Holy Trinity. Below this trinity are the head Orishas of lines, as follows: Oshala Himself, Yemanja, Shango, Ogun, and Oshossi. with the exception of Shango-Cao and Ogun Dile, who once had material life, the Orishas generally do not come down to Earth. For this reason, they are represented here by senior legion Caboclos. the Catholic saints are Orishas. And this is because, at the moment of their death on Earth, they were immediately transported to the Highest Astral” (N. Lopes 853-4).
nature of human reality, a destiny and a cause: Aruanda figures in the Brazilian imagination as a Mount Olympus of African spirits, so to speak. Think: Wakanda. 

Aruanda as a place of ancestral union and communion, the name of the location of the (African) Afterlife in an Afro-Brazilian cosmology, relates exactly to the environment of the Machadiana from the reckoning and recollection of his earliest pieces. His first writings being eulogies for his late infant sister, “Ela” (1854) amongst them, and various poems for his mother – each of these departing years prior to his publishing activity, and announcing their priority as subjects of his writing and reflection. Black writing accompanies the revelation of African diaspora. Black writing as the graphic record both archiving and resonating with/as the performance accompanying African diaspora exodus, and stories the posthumous lives of human ancestry.

The literary machine thus becomes the relay for a revolutionary machine-to-come, not at all for ideological reasons but because the literary machine alone is determined to fill the conditions of a collective enunciation that is lacking everywhere in the milieu: literature is the people’s concern. …The message doesn’t refer back to an enunciating subject who would be its cause, no more than to a subject of the statement (sujet énoncé) who would be its effect.

- Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*
Hamlet observes to Horatio that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in his philosophy. The lovely Rita gave this same explanation to young Camilo, one Friday in November 1869, when he was laughing at her for having consulted a fortune-teller the day before; the only difference was that she used other words to express the idea.

- Machado de Assis, “The Fortune Teller”

Hamlet’s proviso, in the reported speech of the so-called “lovely Rita,” which uses “other words to express the idea[s]” of Shakespeare and the Prince of Denmark, at once performs and subverts a hetero-normative tableau of the typical nineteenth-century “romance” genre of fiction. Although Rita is, perhaps somewhat condescendingly, referred to as “lovely Rita,” in a gendering norm of this literature that elevates the male by comparison, although his attributes are normative rather than spectacular; Camilo is merely “young” (Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis 153). It is with this patriarchal sense of familiarity that “he was laughing at her for having consulted a fortune-teller,” taking on paternalistic roles of explaining away her concerns by rational means and not appealing to the occult for intervention.

The narrator conspires further with this paternalistic attitude by taking the liberty of putting “other words” in Rita’s mouth – thus giving, rather than her reported
speech, a summary. Yet, if to paraphrase Rita the narrator must make recourse to Shakespeare, the narrator’s performance indirectly exalts the woman speaker by operations ostensibly muting it. This extra work on the part of the narrator to convey her actual words otherwise, in “other words,” pays tribute to the speaker who goes one step better than speaking in prose! The lovely Rita happens to be Shakespearean in her own words, ancestor to Pierre Menard, author of Don Quixote? There appear to be more mysteries in the style of one paragraph of “The Fortune Teller” than in the action of its entire plot. Empowered as a speaker in the prose of Shakespeare, but in her own words, the authority of her observation, though lost on her lover, and despite his laughter, foreshadows the nature of their somehow non-mysterious fate. The short story, after all, follows the ostensible form and logic of a pulp love triangle romance – so the question of the future and what it holds, the uncertainty of “to be or not to be” and the certainty of the to come are all contained in the title and concept fortune teller (cartomante, in Portuguese, meaning ‘card reader’ or ‘cartomancer’). Machado’s clever, rational, and magical way of studying ideas, situations, and natures subjects this theme to a most comical and curious meditation. But rather than tracking the fate of these interlocutors, I’m interested in the obsession of Machado’s narrators with quoting Hamlet, this phrase as it repeats in hamlet, and the meanings it urges on or insists upon in such frequent citation and mixology.
The limits and boundaries traversed by black writing in the celestial and chthonic domains fathomed of black letters mirror this expanse of the unknown and unknowable in our midst. Hamlet’s declaration performs a rupture with his time; in an act of epistemic disobedience, subverting convention and unlimiting reason by way of wonder and humility. Silvio notes that the “first citation of this utterance in the chronicles of Machado de Assis appeared in 1873,” (Illustrated Week):

Hamlet is right. There are more things between heaven and earth than those of which our philosophy dreams… The philosophers who take themselves off into the atmosphere in search of systems which usually do not survive the century always seem to me vain dreamers. Down here, gentlemen, come down here, open the newspapers, peruse the police pages and destroy greater difficulties than those that go about dreaming in the between-worlds of Epicurus (Claro 80).

Machado’s remixes of Shakespeare cause us to return to Shakespeare and urge us to remember more than and differently from the multiple uses to which he employs Shakespearean reference – as if in a vain and ebullient attempt to exhaust Shakespearean polysemy, or to showcase the plasticity and excess of treasures hidden and revealed therein. “In the context of the author’s work,” the critic notes, “it was a vain dream to build theories in the air that did not deal with reality. The philosophers should concentrate on the concrete facts that occur on earth and are printed in newspapers” (Claro). Yet Machado’s invitations to the rereading and reimagination of the texts and contexts, subtexts and translations of Hamlet suggests that the reader attend to the
mysteries in the earth and heavens, not just in the world as represented in the popular newspapers or funny papers. Certainly, in his own work, the recurrence of Hamlet’s proviso deserves more of a closer look, but resonates with an excess beyond what daily papers of his day were inclined to reflect on or show. In order to reason with Machado’s citation, let’s return to the work in question for a brief refresher to compare and evaluate the context of the reference to the exorbitance of mystery.

As it is recalled from Act 1, Scene V, Hamlet’s comment refers to specific and unusual events: the consequences of his contact with “the ghost” and his derangement in relation to the gnosis instilled in him by the flash of the spirit’s revelation:

HORATIO: O day and night, but this is wondrous strange.
HAMLET: And therefore as a stranger give it welcome.
There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy (Shakespeare, Thompson and Taylor).

Literature’s interest and involvement, perhaps even collusion, with the invisible, the other-worldly, and the beyond cause it to succeed where science and philosophy may fail not only to explain, but to dream. Through sudden contact with the ancestral body and apprised thenceforth of the historicity of its wounds, Hamlet’s view of the world, supplemented by the incredible – and somehow unquestionable – information from the spectre, has become unstable and irresponsible to terrestrial sovereignties. Hamlet who “know[s] not seems” but already had “within what passes show” before
speaking ghostly, can only embody a kind of “living with spirits” (Derrida Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International); being mortal (becoming) otherwise.

Avery Gordon characterizes “the ghost or apparition [a]s the principle form by which something lost or invisible or seemingly not there makes itself known or apparent” to the living (Gordon 63). The ancestral gnosis of the post-ghost Prince Hamlet, thus a “special way of knowing” or a supplementary knowledge, transforms his relation to the appearances and play of power, himself acting in the manner of the ghost to straddle and travers the (illusory?) “gap between personal and social, public and private, objective and subjective” (98). The theory of the ghost(ly) remarked by Machado’s readings and appropriations of the ancestral tryst as political tragedy and African-descendant insurrection suggests reading itself as a synthesis of the “historical materialist,” who “approaches a historical subject only where [s/]he encounters it as a monad,” within the crystallization of which structure the researcher “recognizes .. a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past” (qtd inGordon 65), those minor, alternative, minority literatures, submerged texts, and silenced histories.

This moment, where “thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions,” Walter Benjamin names the dialectical image and Gordon calls “the ghost” (65): The monad or the ghost presents itself as a sign of the thinker that there is a chance
in the fight for the oppressed past” (65). For Adorno and Horkheimer, “Only the conscious horror of destruction creates the correct relationship with the dead: unity with them because we, like them, are the victims of the same condition and the same disappointed hope” (Horkheimer, Adorno and Schmid Noerr 218). Hamlet, become hapless apprentice to an absent sorcerer; ungrounded geomancer: the blackness of his habit and aspect is no contravention of everyday life in exile: “[h]aunting is a constituent element of modern social life. It is neither premodern superstition nor individual psychosis; it is a generalizable social phenomenon of great import. To study social life one must confront the ghostly aspects of it” (Gordon 7). Assured of this by awareness of ancestral presence and submerged in the absence it presents the descendant, the exilic heir assumes protean and spectral shapes in his own psyche and presentation in order to discover, counter-surveil, and surprise the auspices of the stolen world, to unveil the real, and verify their correspondences with the substance of prophetic, oracular in/sight. The Geistanschauung of the post-ghost Hamlet: the second sight of Machado de Assis.

In the situational comedy of the Weekly Illustrated, or Rita’s off-hand comment in Machado’s “The Fortune Teller,” Hamlet’s comment puts into practice an “epistemic disobedience” (Mignolo) toward engrained forms and received wisdoms, inspired by encounter with truth in history, but also suggest a vision of the cosmos refreshed by wonder, awe, and even terror at the claims of the “ghostly matter” of the inviable worlds
we share, unknowing. The presence of others, revealed by way of inscrutable mystery (i.e., fiction), and open to wonder at outcomes and causes hidden from our knowledge.

A truth he obtained ‘round about midnight by encounter with the invisible realm, Helmut, (meaning Revelation) deposits into this world, translating as if a messenger between worlds: “Doomed for a certain term to walk the night, / And for the day confined to fast in fires, / Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature / Are burnt and purged away.” From a world beyond this world – which is within this world - his apparition conceals and reveals the historical narrative of a people back across the chthonic barrier, from beyond the veil, transfixeding the listener altered by the spirit of the ancient in this “time out of joint.”

It bears mentioning here, however in passing, on the topic of more mysteries, that Hamlet was first performed not in England, or even in Europe, but off the coast of West Africa:

It seems that the first performance of Hamlet of which we have a specific record took place, bizarrely, on board a ship anchored off the coast of Africa in 1607. The evidence is supplied by Thomas Rundall, editor of the 1849 Hakluyt Society publication Narratives of Voyages towards the North-West 1496–1631; he included parts of the journal of Captain William Keeling, who was in command of three ships sponsored by the East India Company which set out for the East Indies in
March 1607 but got separated almost at once. One ship, the Consent, proceeded towards Bantam and the Moluccas, but the other two, the Red Dragon (captained by Keeling) and the Hector (captained by William Hawkins), were beset by storms and anchored off what is now Sierra Leone for six weeks. Keeling’s journal refers to performances of two plays: 1607 September 5th I sent the interpreter according to his desier abord the Hector whear he brooke fast and after came abord me wher we gave the tragedie of Hamlett. September 30 Captain Hawkins dined with me wher my companions acted Kinge Richard the Second. September 31 I invited Captain Hawkins to a fishe dinner and had Hamlet acted abord me w[hi]ch I p[er]mit to keepe my people from idleness and unlawful games or sleepe. These entries were not printed by Samuel Purchas, Keeling’s first editor, in 1625, and an accusation of forgery was made by Sidney Lee, who, in his Life of Shakespeare (1898), listed the entries as fabrications by John Payne Collier and others. This accusation was repeated by Sydney Race in a letter to Notes and Queries in 1950 in which he asserted that the relevant pages were now missing from the journal and claimed that ‘a crew of rude sailors’ could not possibly have memorized ‘two of Shakespeare’s most difficult plays’ (Race, 345–6). William Foster of the East India Office, however, had defended Rundall in 1900, pointing out that not just a few pages but the whole journal was now missing and that this was not surprising given the general state of the archive. He argued that a captain at sea would be more likely to write the impossible date of ‘31 September’ than an ingenious forger, and he put forward evidence of another play performed on an East India Company ship (Foster, ‘Forged’). Foster was (happily, as the editor noted) still alive to respond to Race in 1950, when he made the further points that there had been no public access to the East India House records and that Collier made no reference to these entries later. He assumed, moreover, that what the sailors performed were ‘their own rough versions of the stories of Hamlet and Richard II’ (Foster, ‘Replies’, 415). On the question of the ‘impossible date’, we would add that Henslowe’s diary contains two entries for 31 September 1601 which have not been challenged as forgeries (see Henslowe, 182) (Shakespeare, Thompson and Taylor 54).
This skein of networks of the sleepless dragon that is read across the waters is poetic motion from the mother and muse of our milieu. Although Machado signed his name Job on more than one occasion in the masque of heteronym, and despite the fact that it reads in context for all the world like the Oriki and legends of Ogun, we recognize the following citation as the ancient poetry of Scripture, chapter 41 from the Book of Job:

Wilt thou draw out the leviathan with the hook, and press down his tongue with a cord? Wilt thou put a rush-robe into his nose, and pierce his jaw with a spike? Will he make many supplications unto thee? or will he speak softly unto thee? Will he make a covenant with thee? wilt thou take him as a bondman for ever?

Black leviathan, the long body of the underground network and counter-archive where archipelago tills the *topos* and turns the ground of the *archon*. The literary apparatus of the African diaspora, this “skein of networks” (Latour), works out through the blood and breath, iron and ink of black letters and the black press, a timeless language of integral responsibility for each other and our “own best thing” in this concatenated expansion of the cosmos in the Consent to be several.

In 1896, Machado de Assis repeated the phrase "There are more things between heaven and earth than our vain philosophy dreams of" with respect to the unsolved theft of some dynamite:

Therefore, do not marvel that the dynamite is still unfound. There are more things between heaven and earth than our vain philosophy dreams of. This thought of Hamlet’s is old but is not thereby lost. I don’t ask of truths that they always have white hair, all truths will serve, even those with white and gray hair. Now if there
are many things between heaven and earth, the dynamite might well be there. There is a lot, I admit, but the space is vast and abundant. How shall we fetch it that high? The police, even the English police, who are said to be the best equipped, do not yet possess airborne detectives (Claro).

I believe that “yet” is the operative word here. Machado, “though he lies in no grave” remains underground. Whence so much irony. “Out of the air” more like out of the atmosphere! While remaining accessible, Machado’s writing is at the same time so allusive and oracular that it is unusual to find a story without the hint of a premonition or a clue to a buried treasure. In this case, the old witch’s prescience is dystopian, but no less uncanny: drones truly now are some of the most relied upon detectives in the world with their airborne cameras. The key words that distinguish Machado’s prophecy from fantasy here are ‘not’ and ‘yet,’ but the distance between those two states is immeasurable. Cross off from the list of unrealized Machadian prophecies the case of the Missing Machado: he is not a posthumous person, he is dynamite. It was easier to catch in the light of day a thief of scarves who confronted the masses of people than the thieves who secretly stole more valuable objects in the dark,” Silvo notes. “The between-worlds of Epicurus sheltered even stolen dynamite” (80). Machado is not a stolen life, he is, in his own words, the dynamite that remains ”still unfound.” If you dig the mysteries, they will come.
5.6 Black Skin, Meta(l) Masque: “Under God In[di]visible”

The true is not always likely. It is among those mysteries of “the spirit of Iron,”
(Fatunmbi) the ever new and renewing international poetics and mythos of Ogun, that
bespeak the conditions of Machado’s first publication in the United States. Few existing
works exist in the English language that deal with the critical reception of Machado de
Assis in England and North America, yet it has remained unremarked until now that
Machado himself published in his own name an article in a major American newspaper
in his lifetime, not in translation, but in the native tongue of the Americans. This was no
world-famous short story or cronica, however the publication in question was released
without fanfare or even the faintest trace of fiction. Not in his capacity as Brazil’s
greatest living author, which by most accounts of this time he was, but as Minister of

The publication, the first of Machado’s works to appear in The New York Times,
though unrelated in any ostensible way to Literature, was not only Machado’s US
American debut not in the arts--the genre is non-fiction without being historiographical,
scientific, philosophical or journalistic – all of Machado’s strong suits. It was 1897, and
Machado had not yet been translated into English or heard of in the Anglophone world,
but Machado’s name appeared in newsprint, in the ads section of the Times. Machado
was at that time in the hold, under arrest after the manner of one Joseph K (The Trial),
denied papers of international passage, barred in like so many other African descendants, preventing him from attending the International Exposition in Philadelphia and other events where he might have met in person Frederick Douglass and W.E.B. Du Bois, his phantom kindred and remote interlocutors.

Figure 19 - “PROPOSALS. “LEASING OF BRAZILIAN RAILWAYS:


Below a litany of clauses detailing the means by which the Brazilian railways were by that very speech act signed over to the global market, the distinctive and regal authorial name, signed in capital letters, on the 9th day of January, 1897, “by Order of the Minister,” “General Director,” JOAQUIM MARIA MACHADO DE ASSIS. Oh, the irony.

Brazil was selling its railroad instead of literature in the *Times*; hoarding the novels and stories, plays and poems, cronica and cantos of Machado de Assis for the
Portuguese language. But the really remarkable thing about this Machadiana in the
*Times*, for me, apart from its not being a literary work or mentioning his renown as a
national writer, is that this historical invisibility and personal anonymity have hung over
his reception and perception by that news organ paper to this day. Ghost writing for the
Brazilian railways was apparently not Machado’s first or last sleight of hand; for the lack
of credit due to Machado from the *Times*, he slips in through the back door and behind
the screen of the 20th century’s color line; a first appearance as Machado the writer,
rather than general director, and the first serious considerations of his work in print in
the English language will come through the voicings in the *Los Angeles Times, The New
Amsterdam Times*, and *The Crisis*, the first periodicals that he really got something of the
man he was and the body of work he rendered to posterity.

For not being granted a visa or provided a celebrity’s introduction with his
name’s appearance in the *Times*, he was at least fulfilling his day job’s exacting
requirements, ghost writing on behalf of the Brazilian government itself, personally
discharging matters of state in translation in executing his official duties in the post of
Director of Agricultural Affairs. Why would the director of Agricultural Affairs be
placing an advertisement in the *New York Times*? It seems because Machado’s
administrative position included moonlighting with the department of transportation,
placing an ad on behalf of the Brazilian government, which paid a modest salary, in this
instance; errands that would allow him time to focus on reading, and writing, walking
the city streets, and teaching himself Greek, as he had done since about fifteen years of
age, at least.

If the soul of Haiti is Vodun, the beliefs and practices and worldview of the
Haitian people as it has incorporated in its own unique way the letters and sciences of
African diaspora resonate deeply with the formal and informal expressions of African
intelligences in Brazil and the United States as parts and parcel of the same international
and supranational, even extra-national partage de invisible. In returning to the thought of
Machado’s natality and assessing by sonic and spiritual cartography the conditions
within which he emerged, aside from mortal, human, living, and nameable
interlocutors, Machado never failed to speak glowingly, if not surreptitiously about his
muses. An abundance of clues and gestures in his work are the embarrassment of riches
we have to go on in approaching the threshold of such enchantments, but first we have
to learn to hear and feel the language; thereafter to learn and decipher, to speak and
engage it. Such stages of remove by which the Brazilian literacy has failed to reflect a
critical reading of Machado’s African diaspora inspirations and techniques can be
explained only by the scarcity of scholarly works published on the topic.

As Maya Deren explains of the Haitian cosmology, in which each person is
understood as having been born into the world with a particular mission and guide,
destiny and heritage, and thus to work a devoted relation to the loa can be an expression of an initiate, or spontaneous servant to the loa:

It can imply, for example, that Ogoun, who is the deity of power, confers the favor of his presence and guardianship on a person whose temperament he has found sympathetic; but it can also mean that a person selects, concentrates on, becomes obsessed by and possessed by the deity who personifies his own personal emphasis. Or, finally, it suggests that the two processes may operate simultaneously. In any case, the fact remains that a person who has been possessed by Ogoun is one who emphasizes the principle of power or strength in his own activities.

If this emphasis has been expressed in his life to a remarkable degree, he will be remembered, after death, for this distinguishing characteristic. As time passes and he becomes, to the living, that depersonalized abstraction which is an ancestor, he may then be assimilated into the concept of Ogoun, and so lose his identity altogether in that of the great loa; or his name may be incorporated into the invocation to Ogoun; or, again, if his way of strength was a very distinctive variation on the traditional pattern, he may even become a deity under his own name, a deity understood to be one of the family of Ogouns. By this process a potentially infinite number of ancestral spirits become condensed into a feasible number of variations of the principled archetypes... The entire chain of interlocking links – life, death, deification, transfiguration, resurrection – churns without rest through the hands of the devout. None of it is ever forgotten: that the god was once human, that he has been made a god by humans, that he is sustained by humans (33).

Something about the chthonic deity Ogun, the quintessential “Underground Man,” whose Orphic rise and descent are world-building and world-destroying, which press the limits of death and realization seems to ring out in the toil and hardship, the treason and tragic irony of black experience, which is worth more than its weight in gold on the side of its optimistic force. The auscultation of such throbbing and relentless
rhythm is itself a musical if also historical experience in the transhistorical experience and transmission of black letters.

6. Conclusion: Big X / It

Figure 20: Machado de Assis, Rio de Janeiro, circa 1890.

James Weldon Johnson once wrote of Paul Laurence Dunbar what Ralph Ellison had written of Louis Armstrong: “Dunbar took the humble speech of his people and in it wrought music....” Time has only proven the salience of Johnson’s comparison between Dunbar’s and Machado’s musicality and social substance; they made it out of being invisible. Machado’s impact on the language of Brazilian Portuguese is unprecedented,
but until now, despite resonance with and recognition from contemporaries in the field and foment of a blue and black radical aesthetics, his incredibly fulsome Afro-Brazilian language has not received a distinctive linguistic or ethnographic study of any kind. Only testaments, justified through literary historiography and criticism, which have argued for this possibility or toward a revised public perception. Although writing from a position not steeped in Machadian study, Johnson’s deep readership and powerful intellect produce an affable portrait of a point of comparison with Dunbar’s musical poultice with reference to Cuban, Haitian, and Brazilian writers notable “in the literatures of their respective countries”:

Mention of Dunbar brings up for consideration the fact that, although he is the most outstanding figure in literature among the Aframericans of the United States, he does not stand alone among the Aframericans of the whole Western world. There are Plácido and Manzano in Cuba; Vieux and Durand in Haiti; Machado de Assis in Brazil, and others still that might be mentioned, who stand on a plane with or even above Dunbar. Plácido and Machado de Assis rank as great in the literatures of their respective countries without any qualifications whatever. They are world figures in the literature of the Latin languages. Machado de Assis is somewhat handicapped in this respect by having as his tongue and medium the lesser known Portuguese, but Plácido, writing in the language of Spain, Mexico, Cuba and of almost the whole of South America, is universally known. His works have been republished in the original in Spain, Mexico and in most of the Latin-American countries; several editions have been published in the United States; translations of his works have been made into French and German (Johnson 109).

The way in which the “Spirit of Iron” gathers the cacophonous Martelladas of Ogun’s hammer-fall on the anvil of the black press makes the sound of music, of human
speech and prayer mixed with the writing and stirrings of spirits and soul. A tradition of style and expression more kin than kind\(^\text{10}\) found in the rapping and emceeing, deejaying and mixing of medias that form the basis of an intelligible and coherent social auxiliary language flow together naturally and as a matter of fact in and from the rituals and investments, causes and matters of a black life-writing and posthumous personhood eternal in the writings and personages of Machado de Assis.

As G. Reginald Daniel has argued about the values and principles of Machado’s writerly ethos, an inheritance we have seen derive from the social and spiritual forces of Paula Brito, the Petalogical Society and the Black press, "Chalhoub and Magalhães Junior conclude that, regardless of which party was in power, Machado defended the prerogatives of the public trust against the perennial wrath of the master class" (Daniel 81). Further to the point of this intellectual and stylistic marronage, this quilombysmo of Machado’s African diasporic invention and annunciation:

\(^{10}\) HAMLET (Aside) A little more than kin, and less than kind. 65
CLAUDIUS How is it that the clouds still hang on you?
HAMLET Not so my lord, I am too much i’th’sun.
GERTRUDE Good Hamlet cast thy nighted colour off,
And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark.
Do not forever with thy vailed lids 70
Seek for thy noble father in the dust.
Chalhoub believes that Machado’s experience as a civil servant shaped his consciousness, which in turn informed his literary persona. He argues that the political and social struggle surrounding the Lei do Ventre Livre - driven by the hypocrisy and economic interests of the master class - served as a focal point for Machado’s conceptualization of his novels *Helena* (1876), *Iaiá Garcia* (1878), *Memórias posthumas de Brás Cubas* (Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas; 1881) and *Dom Casmurro* (1899). Chalhoub maintains that the social forces culminating in the Lei do Ventre Livre [Law of the Free Womb] also served as the organizing principle for the short story “Mariana” (1864)...In 1877, Machado, writing under the pseudonym 'Malvolio,' composed a poem in African Brazilian dialect satirizing the parliamentary debates concerning slavery (81).

The translation ‘in vernacular,’ as supplied by Daniel’s study, is his own, yet it opens upon a topic for further considerations on the pointed nature of Machado’s direct engagement, reflection, and meditation in writing on the legacy and mechanism, the reality and consequences of slavery published by Machado in the *Gazeta de noticias*, on September 27, 1887:

> A Holy Day I jess ain’t got / Not ev’n Sunday, and a little ta eat: Saucers an’ beans, an’ coffee, jess a drop / It be jess ‘nough to wet mah teeth. ’Caus uh dis, I be here ta tell / Da Institute, so great and brave; You talked it fine and spaked it well, / But, you be free; I still be a slave (81).

What Machado was and had, what he became and who he was had everything to do with this independence of spirit that not only freely explored the esoteric, and the divine, the opaque or mystical but dealt directly with the needs, demands, and joys of community boisterously upraised from below, and from before. In this case, even before
the proclamation of abolition in 1888, Machado had called out the bluff of Da Institute, resting as he knew it did, still upon the stolen life and nihilated capital of the supposedly somnambulistic, anonymous, invisible, unincorporated.

6.1 (br)Othership Connection: Haitian Manifestations of New International Ogun

So, “Was it an act of "revolution from below,"” Buck-Morss asks, questioning the received wisdom from about the so-called Black Jacobins themselves, was it “the ‘self-sustained activity of the masses?’” (136). Yes. “Dialectics is a challenge from below” (Adorno Negative Dialectics). But what does she (or Marx, for that matter!) mean by “masses?”

Was it a case of premodern laborers breaking out of traditional forms of peasant resistance, finally aiming to overthrow the system of slavery itself? Or, was the ceremony initiated by elite leaders whose use of certain African motifs was "calculated to mobilize support"? Did this event indicate elaborate organization, or the lack of it? Was it "a revolt that broke out prematurely," an unauthorized break in discipline before the conspiracy was supposed to start? And what of the ideology of the insurrection? Was it news from Paris, perhaps the Declaration of the Rights of Man that emboldened the insurgents? Or was the French Revolution peripheral even for the leaders, as it was "liberty for all," not French republicanism they desired? The view that the Bois Caiman blood pact was specifically Dahomean is "difficult to reconcile" with the fact that Kongo slaves were in the majority in the area, where a Ki Kongo political chant was recorded on the eve of the revolution. The "Good Lord" evoked in Boukman’s exhortation has been identified as pagan, specifically, the lead god of Dahomey, but the Kongo majority had been officially Christian since Portuguese Catholic missionaries converted the Kongo king in 1491.
All of these interpretations have been put forward of an event that may not even have happened. It is almost as if it had to happen for interpretation to exist at all. Bois Caiman has assumed signifying power for political judgments that are radically diverse. It is used to mean that Haiti entered into modernity proper because it joined the European story, the only story that counts. Or, it means that with Haiti, history has surpassed this narrative, leaving Europe behind. Or, it means that Haiti has become a nation-like other nations, like Europe, complete with its own military honors, pedigree of "founding fathers," and bloody birth through the sovereign sacrifice of human life. This fight for ownership of Haiti's past revolutionary glory diverts attention from Haiti’s deplorable present reality. It seems crude to discuss Haiti as a bastion of historical significance, when today it is the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere, and when expressions of the political will of the Haitian people continue to this day, after two hundred years, to be hamstrung by the intervention of foreign powers (Buck-Morss 136-7).

The italics in the original in the citation above make it difficult to stylistically emphasize an ancillary word choice in Buck-Morss’s reflection that would otherwise be underscored without further comment, yet it is notable that the fate or summary condition within which the author reads “the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere” as “hamstrung.” When reflecting upon the political lessons of the 1791 Haitian Revolution, its mythology and sacred literary apparatus presents a theory of history bound up with spiritual forces and cosmic principles gathered amongst the Africans at Bois Caiman united in bondage and refusal, but also, perhaps, acts of translation, reconciliation, and imagination worthy of note--and emulation.

Wisely cautioning against attempts to recuperate the heroism or simplify the tumult of the occasion and its process, however, equipped with anecdotal anthropology
and passing familiarity with the African cosmologies and devotional practices in
question, Buck-Morss indexes as a function of administration of the mysteries and
“bloody birth” or “pact” of a sovereign new world peoples. “Haitian political leaders
persecuted Vodou priests even before independence,” she adds, then follows with a note
citing C.L.R. James’ *Black Jacobins*, “(Under Toussaint’s orders, Dessalines slaughtered
over fifty Vodou practitioners, whose own definition of the insurrection threatened their
monopoly of power.)” Is this “why” consistent with what we know or want to know
about Dessalines, Toussaint, or vodoussaint (Vodun faithful)? “Vodou practice was
pushed to the margins,” she continues:

> an embarrassment for "modern" Haitian elites, yet it has remained a way of
> manipulating the poor peasantry, hence a source of power for political oppositions
> of every persuasion. To narrate Haiti’s history as good versus evil stunts our
capacity for moral judgment. Past suffering does not guarantee future virtue. Only
> a distorted history is morally pure” (Buck-Morss 138).

Yet, long after the fateful and contested scene of new world reckoning inscribed
at Bois Caiman, and after the first independent constitution of 1804, succeeding Emperor
Jacques Dessalines, Baba Ogun in the mythic imagination and spiritual memory of the
island’s actual past declares publicly upon the world stage the liberty of Hayti and
equality of all Haitians (as blacks, regardless of the color of their skin) within cosmic and
universal parameters. What was it all about, then? And if it may be open to debate, then
to reframe the terms of history from morality and purity – not the poetics of the Haitian
Revolution by any means – and to do so by listening to the submerged letters and texts, books and persons of the past allow us to know more of what God knows and Hegel doesn’t care to recall.

One of the best illustrations of the divine unity espied through the lens and recorded in the evolution of African diaspora peoples enables us to admire the compelling coherence whereby the harmony of Islamic and so-called “traditional” African religious thought come to rest in the fusion, hybridity, and dialogue of a dialectical image. I am speaking here of the political will expressed in a collective document, the Haitian constitution of 1805, signed by Dessalines, or Baba Ogun, that world-historical and cosmic event declaring the independence of Haiti and Haitians, forever abolishing slavery, and establishing the eternal sovereignty of that Empire in the name of God (“Bismillah”) and before all the beings in Creation.

In the preamble of the second constitution of Haiti, composed in 1805, the complex and extensive totality of this vision of the newly sovereign territory is expressed in theological, cosmic dimensions of a mythic, historical and personal totality by “Emperor Jacques I (Dessalines),” and his cabinet in “THE 1805 CONSTITUTION OF HAITI - SECOND CONSTITUTION OF HAITI (HAYTI) MAY 20, 1805. PROMULGATED BY EMPEROR JACQUES I (DESSALINES)”:

We, H. Christophe, Clerveaux, Vernet, Gabart, Petion, Geffard, Toussaint, Brave, Raphael, … As well in our name as in that of the people of Hayti, who have legally
constituted us faithfully organs and interpreters of their will, in presence of the Supreme Being, before whom all mankind are equal, and who has scattered so many species of creatures on the surface of the earth for the purpose of manifesting his glory and his power by the diversity of his works, in the presence of all nature by whom we have been so unjustly and for so long a time considered as outcast children...Do declare: ...Art. 1. The people inhabiting the island formerly called St. Domingo, hereby agree to form themselves into a free state sovereign and independent of any other power in the universe, under the name of empire of Hayti; 2. Slavery is forever abolished; 3. The Citizens of Hayti are brothers at home; equality in the eyes of the law is incontestably acknowledged, and there cannot exist any titles, advantages, or privileges, other than those necessarily resulting from the consideration and reward of services rendered to liberty and independence; 4. The law is the same to all, whether it punishes, or whether it protects.

The articles that constitute the 1805 Haitian Declaration of Independence and the political formations that issue forth from the manifesto and its signing, collectively declared, affirmed and adopted by its signatories, are themselves enshrined in a proclamation of world-historical precedent and suggest a binding, cosmic reality henceforth (i.e., not “retroactive,” but perpetual) of Haitian independence “in the presence of the Supreme,” and before the gaze and claims of “any other power in the universe.” Slavery was not only “forever abolished” within and by this empire by proclamation of this law, but the revaluation of the economic logics of slavery society were recapitlated, and reconstructed, envisaging wealth not as a measure of accumulation of property and ownership, but as a measure of “reward [for] services rendered to liberty and independence.”
The declaration was, like the documents that informally inaugurated the insurgent quest and question of liberation, not new to its proclaimers, nor un-thought in the history of the world – not the exception but the rule of the quilombismos that had taken root hundreds of years prior throughout the Americas. That social code is a deconstruction and rewriting of race native to the project of Paula Brito’s Homem de Cor (1833), and the concept of the Brazilian as new world American citizen typified by both the emblem of the Moleque of the Illustrated Week, as much as the mother of his invention. As one of the leading scholars in the documents and historiography of the Haitian Constitution and Declarations of Independence, Julia Gaffield has offered, drawing on research from her recent monograph:

The particular copy of the 1805 constitution now at Penn differs from the official Haitian printing of the Constitution at Aux Cayes in its organization and numbering, including the fact that it skips a few sections. The translation, however, does include Article 14, which has in recent years become such a focus of scholarly attention that this constitution might be the most cited document in Haitian history. In Article 14, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, Emperor of Haiti at the time of its publication, articulated an explicitly ideological conception of race.

“Article 14: All meaning of color among the children of one and the same family, of whom the chief magistrate is the father, being necessarily to cease, the Haytians shall henceforth be known by the generic appellation of blacks” (Gaffield).

Furthermore, in this political, military, and economic event and document, harmonizing the African civilizations’ culture and experience, technology and genius of the disparate origins and languages, religions and tribes of the assembled “black
Jacobins,” such offices of state and the following articles that address these foundational concerns of nation-statehood, emphatically and in no unclear terms, solidify their claims in an articulation of Tawhid, Divine Oneness, reminiscent of the Qur’an’s language and style, and identify as Emperor one of the most mythologically and religiously celebrated manifestations in modern history of the concept and career, the mystery and power of “Baba Ogun.” The depth and complexity of African life world surfaces in the new world instance of this document’s composition and emergence with glimmerings of a world society of future islands equal and united in freedom and independence. These dreams of American oneness and salvific destiny begin and end in the realization of the posthumous and perennial, the whole truth and the full record of the complete mystery and hisoricity of the posthumous.

One must judge of search by the standard of the Majnún of Love. It is related that one day they came upon Majnún sifting the dust, and his tears flowing down. They said, “What doest thou?” He said, “I seek for Laylí.” They cried, “Alas for thee! Laylí is of pure spirit, and thou seekest her in the dust!” He said, “I seek her everywhere; haply somewhere I shall find her.”

- Bahá’u’lláh, The Seven Valleys
6.2 Book of Love: Epilogue for Mexico

Bend your knee – this is a tomb. Here lie the mortal remains and cold cadaver of an annihilated people in repose beneath a melancholic recital of prayer encircling the Cross.

Before the universal disaster gave sway to strange instruction kindling the feverish struggle of power and justice; against justice, the century won by sword and cannon.

Invincible force was overthrown; but the unhappily conquered by injury, pain, and hatred spat in the face of evil. The eternal mark shall dim their blonde luster.

And when the fateful cry of saintly liberty arrives in some more prosperous times, calling all humanity, Mexico will live again and from the land arise.

- Machado de Assis, “Epitaph for Mexico”

In the poem’s votive of instruction (“Here lie the remains”), an archaeological formulation takes reverent measure of the forensic evidence of genocide. The
historiographical observation qualified, moreover, by an act of remembrance akin to, yet
other than prayer and mourning which it chronicles and occasions risking, in the facility
or precarity of devotion, kinship with a conquered people. Reviving a “vision of the
vanquished” in prophetic language of messianic eschatology, composing the
redemption song of a future an? indigenous resurrection, “Epitaph for Mexico,” pitches
a momentary flare over an historical site and temporal location clouded in midnight,
hinting at a future daybreak when humanity’s conscience is wakened to the light of
justice as communion with and knowledge of the fullness of human history’s riches.

The poem’s ostensible lament contrasts internally, weighted as it is toward the
overwhelming force of a forthcoming jubilee. Consistent with eulogy, the poem’s
somber tones honor the sunken, the annihilated, and departed with the tragi-comic hope
of a blues aesthetic that would acquire orphic powers of faith and expression for the
time when the dead “arise,” and live again.

11 The Mexica - as they called themselves - had their own record-keeping systems, folded bark codices on
which they painted their genealogy, theology, history, astronomical calculations. Very few of these
records survived the purge by Catholic priests, but soon after the fall … some Mexica scribes… paint[ed]
what they remembered. …In the Florence Codex and five hundred or so other books from this period, as
well as in oral traditions, resides some portion of their ”vision of the vanquished,” (Marcus, Sollors and
Reference).
The “Epitaph of Mexico,” published in Chrysalidas (1864), and the Gods in Suits (1866), attest to the prophetic voice and ecstatic spiritual vision of Machado de Assis from the earliest auspices of his literary success. As he himself, though shyly, adamantly declared openly and in no uncertain or sparse terms, his attraction to and love for all the muses (not just “Brazilian and Portuguese”) and the cosmic mysteries of interest and concern to all peoples, were his constant occupation.

Not least to consider with compassion and reverence those indigenous civilizations that harmonized unprecedented technological, intellectual, and scientific development with a vast and organic spiritual worldview that privileges the ancestor and the earth within which their discarded bones rest as testament and post-script of their natality. It was out of love alone that he could so powerfully and passionately honor them. The salience of his concerns match, then, with the motives and destinies of the living as much as the yet unborn and the yet unremembered.

Speaking of from arising from the ground, on June 12, 2017, the New York Times, online edition, gave a brief report of an ancient Aztec temple discovered under corroding public works in the center of Mexico City. This newly revealed reminder of the deep layers of human history lying restlessly beneath thin layers of dust and furtive reassemblies taken for modern foundations, represents an acceleration in a process of recovery coming out of the woodwork throughout the Americas. A few days before the
Times, on Thursday 8 June 2017, The Guardian Unlimited ran the story as well. On the one hand, the “rediscovery” of what posthumous time century after century has repeatedly taken for granted as a mutable foundation, pushed back into the earth, has repeatedly revealed and discarded this wrack and detritus of the Atlantic Flood.

The salvific vision of a Mexica lucida arisen from the abysmal waters of sunken memory performs a remediating rereading of Christian eschatology – a deconstruction of Christianity’s historical encounter with the Americas – enfolding even the victims of its missiological scourge, then both the kingdom of heaven and the return of the Mexica are very near. Ever nearer to the moment of completion; without end – black reading, black writing, and the reflection they engender which keeps them together in relation – black letters are an episodic and therefore gradual revelation of their essential oneness and agreement. Only in space and time do they necessarily differ in coincidence; if the sleepers awaken, and the arks arise, the fraught and serialized destiny of an exiled and subjected people to be: gathered up in diaspora; and bound “in a single book of love.”

12 Dante, Paradiso XXXIII.
Works Cited


---. "Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 112.4 (2013): 737-80. Print.


Biography