

Book Review

Aidoo, Lamonte, and Daniel F. Silva, editors. *Emerging Dialogues on Machado de Assis*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

In the context of Machadian studies, the present volume is a welcome surprise. Aidoo and Silva are both US-based specialists in nineteenth-century Brazilian literature and culture, and they propose to reevaluate this literature from a multidisciplinary perspective. Despite the chosen title, *Emerging Dialogues* includes not only original works and ideas but also pre-existing material on the Machado de Assis. This is the case of the foreword by Nelson H. Vieira, which, resulting from a lecture delivered in 2008, now offers an insightful panorama of Machado's life and work and a thorough yet helpfully succinct history of the criticism devoted to the author from its origins to 2015.

Both the foreword and the editors' introduction emphasize the need to consider Machado through a renewed understanding of nineteenth-century Brazil, locating the author between his humble origins and specific background, and the universality of his literary reach, which granted him a prominent place in "world literature" (xvi; 3). Aidoo and Silva invite us to think of Machado "as not only the political critic or keen, biting social observer of his time, but also as a sort of queer theorist, feminist thinker, postcolonial critic, and even psychoanalyst" (3-4).

Opening Part I, we find Lília Moritz Schwarcz's historical introduction, in which she reflects on the role of Machado as a writer and a civil servant in a shifting political scene during the years of a fading empire and a rising republic. Next, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht offers one of the most stimulating pieces in the book by recalling the need to recognize the importance of the author's *oeuvre* in global terms as "a potential part of world literature" (35) while also tackling the difficult subject of Realism as a movement marked by "narrative volatility" (32) and a seemingly paradoxical "concern with grasping reality" (34). Pedro Meira Monteiro's double perspective on Machado and Blaise Pascal is promising in its attempt to rethink a connection scrutinized in previous studies, but it would have

been more helpful had it relied less on general remarks such as “the Machadian character” (47) or “Machadian literature” (49).

Dedicated to questions of race and social status, Part II starts with Sidney Chalhoub’s account of an anti-slavery stance in a small number of Machado’s short works and selected passages of *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas*. The historian’s redemptive view of Machado is, however, deconstructed in the three following chapters. Fernando Sousa Rocha reinstates the “imprecise distinction” between “slave catcher” and “slave” (97) that permeates not only Machado’s narratives but also the history of Brazil as an inherently multi-racial country. G. Reginald Daniel’s interpretation of the “Tragic Mulatto” motif also focuses on the author’s “struggle with duality and ambiguity” (72), both in his work and in his life, where he stood “between and betwixt” (75) racial and social categories. Sonia Roncador’s meditation on Machado’s opinions on Chinese immigration to Brazil revises common preconceptions about his supposed silence on matters of race and slavery, emphasizing his “ambivalent and often contradictory positions” (107) as a multi-racial person, a writer, and a representative of the elite.

Parts III and IV focus on the broad field of gender studies. Earl E. Fitz reads “Lição de Botânica” as an allegory of the emancipation of women, a process he deems intimately related to the struggle for racial equality; while Marta Peixoto interprets the avoidance of closure in *Dom Casmurro* as an effective means to enhance Capitu’s indeterminate nature, exploring the dynamics between women’s growing political agency and the expectations still limiting them at the time, as well as in Machado’s own mind.

From a complementary angle, the three subsequent chapters revolve around masculinity and the complexities of male protagonists. It is surprising that, in their own studies on “homoaffectivity” and “homosociability” in *Dom Casmurro*, Camilo Gomides and Richard Miskolci make no mention to Luiz Fernando Valente’s previous chapter, which reproduces an article on a related subject first published in 2001. Nevertheless, in its attempt to capture overlooked nuances in the novel, this section earns special relevance for expanding with new methodological rigor on oft-cited works by Roberto Schwarz and John Gledson, and particularly for offering diverging perspectives on Helen Caldwell’s landmark work (*The Brazilian Othello of Machado de Assis: A Study of Dom Casmurro*, U of California P, 1960).

The last part of the volume represents a final turn to questions of textuality. Echoing previous chapters, M. Elizabeth Ginway offers a convincing allegorical reading of three tales of the “quasi-macabre” (211) in which the supposedly fantastical element aims to express a covert critique of the Second Empire and thus “contest the official version of history” (212). In his remarkable take on “A Causa Secreta”, Paulo Moreira argues with precise instantiation for the intermingling of author, narrator, and reader in a productive ritual of knowledge-gaining and “literary sadomasochism” (234). And harking back to the concerns dealt with in Part II, Giulia Ricco closes the volume with a syncretic view of another short story through which she conflates the sociological idiosyncrasies of nineteenth-century Brazil and Machado’s skillful use of irony in a “game of ‘show and not tell’” (239). Ricco’s piece is a clever conclusion, given its ability to tie up some of the strings that hold the book together.

One less positive aspect of Aidoo and Silva’s editorial endeavor can be its occasional repetitiveness. *Dom Casmurro* is the main object of analysis in four succeeding chapters sharing identical viewpoints on homoeroticism. An equal number of chapters focus on the short story “Pai contra Mãe” to explore the same topics of slavery and servitude. The result is that the book does not cover Machado’s *oeuvre* and literary worldview as richly as it could have done. Nevertheless, *Emerging Dialogues* has the virtue of shedding new light on lesser-known or rarely studied works, with a special emphasis on the shorter fiction, which is an important move away from the superabundant criticism on the author’s most celebrated novels and a clear sign of a flourishing interest in unjustly neglected texts. The book is also especially relevant as only the second collective work on Machado in the English language after Richard Graham’s *Machado de Assis: Reflections on a Brazilian Master Writer* (U of Texas P, 1999). It succeeds in projecting the author onto the global stage and, while promoting reliable scholarship, in bringing together positively disparate views by scholars sharing various origins, affiliations, and standpoints. *Emerging Dialogues* is a praiseworthy effort to connect recent studies on Machado with the broader areas of knowledge to which they contribute, and on an international scale.

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