

"THE SUPREME BLACK LITERARY ARTIST": A RACIALIZED MACHADO DE ASSIS IN THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING WORLD

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Abstract: David Damrosch argues that world literature is the locus of negotiation between a source and a host culture, with works increasingly being favored for exhibiting identities based on racial, ethnic, or cultural differences. We examine racial perspectives on Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis (1839-1908) by English-language critics, largely in North America, from the late twentieth century to the present. In the twentieth century, Machado was successful among academics and critics but not the general public. In the twenty-first century, re-translations of his works have widened his visibility among the general English-language readership. His recent critical reception also reveals greater interest in his racial background. As a multiracial individual of partial African descent and the grandson of freed slaves, Machado has been situated in an African diasporic or Black literary canon as he is read from a racial perspective by North American critics.

Keywords: World literature; Machado de Assis; Black Literature; Latin American Literature; Brazilian Literature; race studies.

"O SUPREMO ARTISTA LITERÁRIO NEGRO": UM MACHADO DE ASSIS RACIALIZADO NO MUNDO ANGLÓFONO

Resumo: *David Damrosch argumenta que a literatura mundial é um locus de negociação entre uma cultura fonte e uma cultura hospedeira, com obras cada vez mais favorecidas por exibir identidades baseadas em diferenças raciais, étnicas, ou*

culturais. Examinamos as perspectivas raciais sobre Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis (1839-1908) por críticos de língua inglesa, principalmente na América do Norte, desde o final do século XX até o presente. No século XX, Machado fez sucesso entre acadêmicos e críticos, mas não entre o público em geral. No século XXI, as retraduições de suas obras ampliaram sua visibilidade entre o público geral de língua inglesa. Sua recente recepção crítica também revela maior interesse em sua origem racial. Como um indivíduo multirracial de ascendência africana parcial e neto de escravos libertos, Machado se situou em um cânone literário da diáspora africana ou negra, conforme é lido a partir de uma perspectiva racial pelos críticos norte-americanos.

Palavras-chave: *Literatura mundial; Machado de Assis; Literatura Negra; Literatura Latino-americana; Literatura Brasileira; estudos de raça.*

In his study on the reception of Machado de Assis in the 1950s and 1960s, Earl Fitz asked why Machado was not read in the United States “as a writer who had something important to say about race relations?” and “how he would have fared in United States of the 1950s, or the racially turbulent 1960s, if he had been seen as someone from a culture that had a lot to teach Americans about issues of race” (FITZ, 2009, p. 27). We may never know the answer to these questions, but they are now beginning to be answered more extensively. Critic David Damrosch defines world literature as the locus of negotiation between a source culture and a host culture, and a “space defined in many ways by the host culture’s national tradition and the present needs of its own writers” (DAMROSCH, 2003, p. 283). In this vein, Damrosch also notes that in recent critical trends, “more and more works of world literature are now favored for displaying specific ethnic identity or cultural difference” (DAMROSCH, 2003, p. 187).

Such difference might be used to negotiate a space for an author from a given source culture to penetrate a host culture, as a recent wave of publications on Machado exemplifies. Indeed, race and ethnicity might be positioning Machado as a well-known global name. Here we examine works published between 2002 and 2018 that point toward race-related readings of Machado, or use his racial background to add value to his writing or to highlight his genius. We examine articles and books published by specialists and scholars, and the

discourse publishers use when advertising Machado's work, to illustrate how race-related readings of Machado, while still acknowledging his importance as an author, signify a new step into his life as an author of world literature. Such readings do not simply contextualize Machado in Brazil or Latin America; they also fulfill a broader demand for literature written by racial "minorities."

1. Machado de Assis in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century

Hélio de Seixas Guimarães, a notable Machado specialist, maintains that the topic of race in Machado is complex and not necessarily easy to discern in his writings. But this complexity is, in many ways, explained by the complexity of race in Brazil, the last nation in the Americas to legally abolish African slavery in 1888, when Machado was nearly fifty. Historian Lilia Schwarcz explains that slavery in Brazil, "transformou-se num modelo tão enraizado que acabou se convertendo numa linguagem," (2019, p. 22) creating "uma sociedade condicionada pelo paternalismo e por uma hierarquia muito restrita." (2019, p. 23).¹

Machado, the grandson of freed slaves, and the son of a mulatto painter and a White Portuguese washerwoman, lived in this historical context.² His rise to social prominence was an exception in a slave society founded on racial hierarchies. But Brazil was characterized by pervasive miscegenation, more fluid racial markers, and a ternary racial order that differentiated its population into Whites (*brancos*), multiracials (*pardos* in official contexts; *mulatos* or *mestiços* in everyday parlance), and Blacks (*pretos*). Moreover, compared to the United States, racial designations came to be based primarily on appearance in combination with culture and class, rather than on ancestry.

Also, the United States designated as Black all individuals of African ancestry based on the "one-drop rule" of hypodescent ("one drop of African blood") consigning multiracials to the same subaltern status as Blacks. It also perpetuated a binary racial order wherein one was either White or Black. In Brazil, Carl Degler argues that the

1. "[T]ransformed itself into a model so ingrained that it ended up becoming a language...a society conditioned by paternalism and a very restrictive hierarchy."

2. The term "mulatto" is often considered derogatory, particularly contemporarily. We use it for clarity purposes, as it was used in vernacular parlance during the historical period discussed here to refer to mixed-race people of African and European descent.

“mulatto escape hatch” (1971, p. 225)³ has allowed a few exceptional individuals designated as mulattoes to integrate into European Brazilian society contingent upon their approximation to White phenotypical and cultural norms. Collectively, pardos and pretos, that is, African Brazilians (*negros*), have been retained at the bottom of society.

These social dynamics allowed Machado to be identified as White at the end of his life despite his background. They also allowed him to exist, until recently, as a non-African Brazilian figure in Brazilian history. Yet during his lifetime, he remained fundamentally vulnerable in his European Brazilian sociocultural milieu as his somatic identity was always apparent. The racial debate in Brazil was obfuscated by policies that celebrated a fabricated racial harmony and ignored historical wounds and inequalities. Indeed, Brazil’s troubled racial history allowed only a few African Brazilian writers, such as Lima Barreto and Cruz e Sousa, to be part of the national literary canon. Machado is also an African Brazilian author in this canon. However, he has not always clearly been seen as such in Brazil.

In “Race and Color in the Reception of Machado de Assis” (2017), Guimarães focuses mainly on Brazilian perceptions of Machado’s race. He also sheds light on how his race was discussed in the U.S. He shows that Machado came to be whitened from the moment of his death: his birth certificate did not indicate his race but his death certificate and obituary declared he was White. However, Machado’s racial background was not ignored during his lifetime. Some of his critics and opponents, such as African Brazilian public school teacher Hemetério dos Santos (1858-1938) and prominent African Brazilian abolitionist, journalist, and novelist José do Patrocínio (1854-1905) expressed anger toward him for supposedly denying his Blackness and refusing to take up the cause of Abolition.

Army colonel, historian, and politician Augusto Fausto de Sousa (1835-1890) and poet Sílvio Romero (1851-1914) also used Machado’s race to diminish his work. In an article about Machado’s first novel, *Ressurreição* (1872), Sousa draws attention to the esteemed reputation the writer had already attained as a poet, critic and playwright, but also mentions the “obscuridade da sua origem”⁴ and thereby implies both ignorance and the possibility that Machado’s forebears were Black. He refers

3. Degler does not imply, as some argue, that multiracials, collectively speaking, are significantly better off than Blacks (SILVA, 1985). Rather, the mulatto escape hatch is an informal device that has awarded select *individual* multiracials the rank of situational Whiteness in accordance with their approximation to White norms.

4. “Obscurity of his origin.”

to Machado's "trigueiro" countenance, i.e., dark like ripe, brown wheat, which he associates with the writer's features. This physical characterization stands in contrast to Machado's "beleza interior," "limpeza d'alma," and "límpido espelho de consciência" (apud GUIMARÃES, 2017, p. 13).⁵

Guimarães notes that in Brazil it was only in the 1930s that Machado's race came to be referred to in a positive way. He attributes this change to Gilberto Freyre, who celebrated Brazil's miscegenation. From this point forward, "Machado also becomes a symbol of reconciliation... because he had crossed a social gap" (2017, p. 19). Guimarães also shows how, already in the 1960s United States, Machado was catalogued as a "Negro" in many libraries and dictionaries. He also discusses how the response of Brazilian critics to U.S. publications tried to minimize and, to a certain degree, deny Machado's Blackness.

One important work that Guimarães briefly cites in this regard is *The Negro in Brazilian Literature* (1956), by Raymond S. Sayers, a U.S. scholar of Brazilian studies. Sayers argues that while Machado did not personally speak of or refer to his African ancestry⁶ and did not feature Black and multiracial characters as main subjects of his stories, he was sympathetic to abolitionist ideas. He did not have many black characters among his protagonists because "The Negro [in Machado's time] could not serve as a subject for the irony of Machado, for the Negro could never determine his own conduct or his own position in society; he was not a free agent, and therefore he could not be made a subject for satire" (SAYERS, 1956, p. 204). Sayers contends that in this context Machado "could only illustrate his theme of man's essential puniness by using as his personages, members of the upper classes, people who did not have enough imagination to use their privileged economic position as a means of obtaining spiritual freedom" (p. 208). He also claims that Machado had more African Brazilian characters than many other writers in the urban tradition, and that they are almost always portrayed with sympathy at a time when writers largely rendered them invisible.

5. "Machado's 'interior beauty,' 'purity of soul,' and 'clear mirror of conscience.'"

6. It is quite reasonable to assume that Machado may have felt a certain uneasiness about and sought to bring as little attention as possible to his racial background given the scientific racism and biological determinism that pervaded nineteenth-century Brazil. This ideology espoused the negative consequences of miscegenation and inferiority of multiracials. There are no statements by Machado that would provide a definitive assessment of his attitudes in this regard. Still, Machado has been criticized for his lack of passionate and vigorous public engagement in the campaign for abolition like other African Brazilians such as Luís Gama and José do Patrocínio. However, Machado did, in fact, address these issues in his writings (For a lengthy discussion of this complex topic see Daniel, 2012 as well as Dixon, 2010).

Because of slavery, many Brazilians have historically avoided identifying with their African ancestry although most are of mixed race. Indeed, the mulatto escape hatch in its broadest sense has allowed millions of individuals with African ancestry, who display a more European phenotype, to be self-identified and designated as Whites. They partake in all the privileges of Whiteness and thus completely escape Blackness and its social liabilities. Conversely, in the U.S., the one-drop rule could transform into Black individuals who appeared White and subject them to the accompanying social indignities. In Brazil, the escape hatch became a form of social control as many individuals possessing the socio-cultural capital to serve as voices in the antiracist struggle were and still are co-opted into silence.

Although Machado benefited from the escape hatch, by the second half of the twentieth century he began to be more frequently recognized as mixed-race. This might be related to the efforts of Brazil's Black movements to reclaim an accurate view regarding his race. It was also attributable to the racial policies of President Getúlio Vargas, who in the 1930s and 1940s, presented Brazil as a racial democracy in which social inequality was based on socioeconomic class. Racism was then minimized and miscegenation was celebrated in order to forge a national identity. Yet in reality, discrimination interwove class, culture, and physical appearance, with darker-skinned individuals disproportionately at the bottom of the social order. The popular saying "money Whitens," utilized as proof of Brazil's racial democracy, was also evidence of tacitly ignored White privilege.

In the second half of the twentieth century, the idea of racial democracy, heavily influenced by Freyre's work, began to be contested by scholars and activists. In this same period, Machado's race was more frequently mentioned in the U.S., even if mostly in a peripheral way, when Anglophone critics were writing about his books. For instance, Helen Caldwell cites Machado's background as bibliographical information in *The Brazilian Othello of Machado de Assis: A Study of Dom Casmurro* (1960). Although her analysis does not touch on race, her subsequent book, *Machado de Assis: The Brazilian Master and His Novels* (1970), does. Similarly, in a 1953 *New York Times* review of *Machado of Brazil: The Life and Times of Machado de Assis* by Brazilian author José Bettencourt Machado, William Grossman, a translator of Machado, highlights his race. Here, rather than critiquing the book he is reviewing, Grossman traces a profile of Machado himself as an "enigmatic Brazilian mulatto" (1953, p. 135) and compares him to Cervantes and Hemingway. Although *Machado of Brazil* was written by a Brazilian, it was available

to Anglophone readers and also provided information on Machado's racial background and his struggles in certain periods of his life.

Yet, as Fitz indicates, although this racial background was at times acknowledged in scholarly production, even if it was not the main theme, this remained rare in the English-language press until the end of the twentieth century. For instance, Dudley Fitts did not touch on it when reviewing Caldwell's translations of *O alienista* in 1963. Charles Poore did not either when reviewing in 1965 *Esau e Jacó*, and neither did Jenny McPhee in 2000, when reviewing the same story.⁷ In the twenty-first century, however, this starts to change.

2. Machado de Assis in the Twenty-First Century

Recent critical material on Machado by Brazilianists and non-Brazilianists, in the press and in academia, suggests that Machado's race now adds value to his literature. It has thus become unlikely that an author will discuss Machado's writings without also mentioning his race. In 2002, Harold Bloom, a non-Brazilianist but a major North American literary critic, included Machado in *Genius*, a book dedicated to listing one hundred outstanding creative minds in the world, including Shakespeare, Nietzsche, and Cervantes. In the pages about Machado, Bloom states: "The genius of irony has given us few equals of the African-Brazilian Machado de Assis, who seems to me the supreme black literary artist to date" (2002, p. 674).

Bloom says that, while reading Machado, he "first wrongly assumed he was what we call 'white.'" He writes: "I had fallen in love with his work...before I learned that Machado was a mulatto, and the grandson of slaves" (2002, p. 675). Here, Bloom calls attention to the fact that race was not one of Machado's main themes. Instead, he "adopt[ed] a rather decadent Portuguese-Brazilian white

7. In 1963, Dudley Fitts, a prominent American writer and scholar, reviewed Caldwell's translations of *The Psychiatrist and other stories*. Fitts describes Machado as "a Brazilian Master," and does not offer many biographical notes. He instead traces parallels between the short stories he is reviewing and Machado's *Brás Cubas* and *Dom Casmurro*. Charles Poore was a critic for *The New York Times* and served as chairman of the *Yale Literary Magazine*. In his review of Caldwell's translation of *Esau e Jacó*, he highlights the novel's metaphor for Brazil's transition from empire to republic, and even cites the country's abolitionist movement. Still, he does not consider Machado's position in Brazilian society. Thirty five years later, Jenny McPhee, also in *The New York Times*, reviews a retranslation of the same story by Elizabeth Lowe, once again contextualizing the story but not Machado himself.

perspective” (2002, p. 675). Bloom nevertheless describes Machado as a “miracle,” a “demonstration of the autonomy of the literary genius in regard to time and place, politics and religion” (2002, p. 675).

Bloom’s article reveals that, for him, Machado became a more interesting writer after the race factor was discovered. Although Bloom already admired Machado’s work, discovering Machado’s Blackness was the icing on the cake because it revealed Machado’s ability to appropriate the lives of the White-only elite and satirize them. For Bloom, Machado’s race also functioned as some sort of proof that a genius mind worked relatively independently from its social context. It thus made him someone who defied the obvious ways of writing one’s story both in life and in literature.

Yet even while highlighting such autonomy, Bloom inserts the adjective “black” before the noun artist when describing Machado as “the supreme black literary artist to date” (2002, p. 674) This makes a difference in Bloom’s discourse, as it implies the existence of a general literary canon that includes writers of different backgrounds, and a *Black* literary canon. Machado thus appears first among White European writers and, second, in the Black canon he occupies. Bloom’s article is an example of what Damrosch discusses in his book, as Machado’s African Brazilian background is given new appeal in Bloom’s vision. Machado’s work thus gains new significance as it was not simply a Brazilian writing about Brazilian elites, but a *Black* Brazilian writing about *White* Brazilian elites.

That Machado’s race makes a positive difference in the way North American readers see his work is also clear in the non-academic critical reception of his recent anthology, *The Collected Stories*. In venues such as *The New York Times* and *The New Yorker* we see a willingness to read Machado’s works as subjects of racial-oriented analysis, which adds to his quality. Starting with the *Times* and a 2018 review titled “A Master Storyteller From 19th-Century Brazil, Heir to the Greats and Entirely Sui Generis,” Parul Sehgal, a journalist and critic, reflects on Machado’s biography as a complex historical factor when considering his social position in the Brazil of his time: “The protean, stubbornly unclassifiable Machado was born into poverty, the mixed-race grandson of freed slaves. He had no formal education or training.” She is frustrated at Machado’s “refusal to write more explicitly about slavery. He might not have dared; slavery ended in Brazil only in 1888” (2018).

However, Sehgal also says that “Machado is always writing about liberation in his way, which to him begins with the freedom—*the obligation*—to think.” She concludes by stating that “To Machado, your identity and the contours of your world are formed not just by your circumstances but by what you think about habitually. You are what you contemplate, so choose wisely” (2018). Here, we call attention to Sehgal’s choice of the words “identity,” “freedom,” and “circumstances” and the way they position Machado as an African Brazilian who subverted the context around him. Even though Machado did not write explicitly about slavery, for Sehgal, his stories were political. His tendency to avoid race was almost an act of subversion—as if he had been freed by the knowledge he perceived and produced.

An article by Benjamin Moser in *The New Yorker* further adds to the discussion. A biographer and translator of Clarice Lispector, Moser is not exactly an outsider in Brazilian studies, but his article is telling of the racial debate around Machado. He notes that Machado’s ancestry “is often the first fact mentioned about his life,” including in the introduction to the collection. Yet Moser thinks Machado would not have chosen to speak openly about his racial background⁸ (“It is not a label he would have elected”) (MOSER, 2018). Moser also states that the emphasis on it often “obscures other surprising facts about his life,” he himself moves in this direction. Moser contextualizes the racial situation in Brazil and emphasizes that Machado had suffered racism, as “some found him too black” (MOSER, 2018), which is likely to be a reference to the same critics discussed by Guimarães. Moser also notes that although being mixed and poor has almost never been remarkable in Brazil, “people of visibly mixed race were rare in the higher society that Machado entered while relatively young” (2018). As in Bloom’s work, Machado is therefore portrayed as the exception.

The fact that both Sehgal and Moser touch on Machado’s race is not decontextualized from the anthology they are reviewing. Indeed, *The Collected Stories* invites us to think about the racial significance of Machado’s work. Not only do we have Bloom’s quote that Machado is “the supreme black literary artist to date” and background on Machado’s race, but the foreword by Michael Wood also delivers a race-oriented reading of his work. Wood notes that “slavery was finally abolished in Brazil in 1888, by which time Machado had published four of his seven volumes of stories” and that

8. See footnote 6.

“slaves are everywhere in these works, a fact of life, and not often commented on” (WOOD, 2018, p. xiii). For him, through Machado’s stories, “We can be sure that Machado has little sympathy for the woman who complains of her ‘feckless slaves,’ or the man who alternately smashes plates over slaves’ heads and calls them by ‘the sweetest, most endearing names” (WOOD, 2018, p. xiii). Yet Wood infers that Machado is silencing his own opinions by letting readers judge the characters. The first pages of the book direct one to hunt for Machado’s hints on race.

Other recent publications also focus on Machado’s race when promoting his books. For instance, the official webpage for the 2021 Penguin Classics edition of *Brás Cubas*, a best-selling translation by Flora Thomson-DeVeaux, emphasized Machado’s race as much as the book itself by advertising the book as “A revelatory new translation of the playful, incomparable masterpiece of one of the greatest black authors in the Americas.” It notes that “The mixed-race grandson of ex-slaves, Machado de Assis is not only Brazil’s most celebrated writer but also a writer of world stature, who has been championed by the likes of Philip Roth, Susan Sontag, Allen Ginsberg, John Updike, and Salman Rushdie.”⁹ The Penguin Classics label is itself an indicator of canonization, and we also see a calling for Machado’s position in the Black or African Diasporic literary canon. As in Bloom’s writings, there is an adjective before the word “authors.”

The presence of the word “black” affects the meaning of the noun and again implies the existence of a Black literary tradition in which Machado would be inserted. He is not simply one of the “greatest authors in the Americas,” he is one of “the greatest *black* authors in the Americas” (Penguin Random House; Emphasis added). Even if the emphasis on Machado’s race is not applied to the context of the novel itself, it surely has a purpose. Perhaps Random House was willing to emphasize Machado’s social position, showing how he is not just another important writer from a remote literary tradition, but also capable of holding importance in an international context by occupying a space in the host culture U.S. literary tradition as a new example of a non-White genius. In 2020, this edition sold out on Amazon and Barnes and Noble in only one day. Even

9. *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas*. Penguin Random House.

<<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.ca/books/618216/the-posthumous-memoirs-of-bras-cubas-by-machado-de-assis-translated-with-an-introduction-and-notes-by-flora-thomson-deveaux-foreword-by-dave-egggers/9780143135036>>. Acesso em: 1 jan. 2021.

though we do not intend to provide a hasty or hurried co-relation here, one should also acknowledge that it sold out precisely when the Black Lives Matter protests were at their highest peak in May. This adds at least a symbolic layer.

The news that Machado's Blackness was claimed by Brazilian Black movements had reached the U.S. public in 2019. That year, *The New York Times'* Shannon Sims wrote an extensive article titled "In Brazil, a New Rendering of a Literary Giant Makes Waves." A news report rather than criticism, this touches on the "Machado de Assis Real" movement, which intends to shed light on the Whitening process in which Machado himself was a character, since the "traditional historical photo of him shows a man, whose skin is nearly as light as his crisp white dress shirt" (SIMS, 2018). In the context of this movement, a project at the Universidade Zumbi dos Palmares in Brazil digitally recreated Machado's skin color, revealing a darker tone than the classical black-and-white version.

The movement encourages readers to stick the digitally colored photo on their books, replacing the older, Whiter ones. The *Times* report hosts, on its cover, a picture of Machado in black and white next to his new image. It also includes interviews with Brazilian students who describe how they have always been taught that Machado was White. The fact that a newspaper outside Brazil had published news about the new racial discourse around the author shows how Machado's social ambivalence is an interesting story for an English-speaking audience. The rediscovery of his race also brings more visibility to the African Brazilian community, whose prominent characters can serve as a model for redefining canons.

In the English-speaking academy, the discussion of Machado's race defies the idea that as a writer he was uninterested in the topic. It rather points out that, as a mixed-race man, he would carry racial duality in his thoughts and writings, increasing the scope of a race-related interpretation of his work. In 2010, Paul Dixon argued that, while Machado's race was a recurrent theme in his reception, "many readers have underestimated the amount of attention Machado did pay to the topic" (p. 40). He rescues Machado's early narratives in which slaves and their descendants are the main characters. This challenges the usual discourse that Machado chose not to represent his racial peers and silences the moment when he did.

Dixon discusses the story "Virginius and Mariana" and the narrative poem "Sabina," published between 1868 and 1875, which touch on matters of the

difficulty of social mobility for African descendants and cruelty against slaves. Although these are “minor” works by Machado, Dixon does draw attention to the necessity of reading overlooked texts to shed light on the subjectivity of African descendants. Dixon’s study refutes the idea that Machado does not have much to say regarding his experience as an African Brazilian. This is an important step in Machadian criticism as the story of the writer’s race starts to be re-discussed.

As Dixon argues, there may not be enough in Machado’s works to position him as an African Brazilian writer. But his article and the texts it addresses, do show a writer in the beginning of his career, struggling to find a theme, the most obvious one being his own context. By pointing out race as a subject that first explicitly appeared in Machado’s writings but was later diluted in his most important novels, studies like Dixon’s indicate how African Diasporic artists might have had to silence their opinions on race in order to gain prestige. His projection of Machado’s voice as an African Brazilian writing about Blackness could bring international attention as, especially in the United States, there is a call to amplify Black voices.

G. Reginald Daniel’s *Machado de Assis: Multiracial Identity and the Brazilian Novelist*, reflects on Machado’s biography and writings in terms of how he publicly and privately dealt with his own multiracial identity and experience, and with racism and slavery as contemporary issues of social justice. As a comparative historical sociologist, Brazil specialist, and critical mixed race studies scholar, Daniel addresses this through contemporaneous and posthumous critiques of Machado’s supposed masking of his African ancestry and through his alleged insufficient engagement with abolitionist and antiracist struggles. Daniel points to numerous examples of Machado repudiating slavery, particularly in his chronicles, though many were published under pseudonyms. While acknowledging the lack of identifiably African Brazilian protagonists in Machado’s fiction, Daniel translates this into a larger project in which the author critiques dualistic and dichotomous forms of thinking, including about race. Rather than indicative of self-Whitening, Daniel views the issue as one of critical multiraciality: “... [Machado] endeavored...to become a ‘meta-mulatto,’ that is, a mulatto whose writing grappled with the universal questions of duality and ambiguity in all human existence—miscegenation in a higher sense” (DANIEL, 2012, p. 120-121).

For Daniel, the dualism and ambiguity Machado experienced between himself as a mulatto and the dominant Euro-Brazilian culture was a source of his intense concern with the dual and ambiguous relationship between individual morality or conscience (the internal or subjective self) and the image reflected through social interactions (the external or objective self), motivated by egoism and the dictates of public success. Machado's critique of race is, in fact, masterfully oblique and imbedded in an interrogation of modernity and its Eurocentric dichotomization of the subjective and objective dimensions of human identity and experience into mutually exclusive categories of experience. Machado saw as a reflection of the struggles confronting humanity his own as a mulatto seeking to achieve upward mobility and public success without compromising his integrity in a society that prized Whiteness and stigmatized Blackness.

In Daniel's view, Machado was sensitive to liminality and his experience enhanced his ability to convey shades of meaning (2012, p. 238). Machado thus rejects an "either/or" perspective in favor of a "both/neither" one that reflects his broader understanding of what it meant to be *both* Black and White, yet *neither*. As a subject of study in the English sphere, Machado has gone beyond Brazilianists and literary studies to reach sociology and race studies. Daniel's interpretation of his ironic and ambiguous voice as a reflection of his mulatto condition is therefore a contribution to deciphering complex race relations in the global African Diaspora and in Brazil itself.

3. Machado in the Era of Black Lives Matter

In the context of the turbulent racial relations of the 1950s and 1960s United States, Fitz questions whether, if Machado had been presented as an author with much to say about Blackness and other social matters, might he have been more widely read? Today, the sociopolitical situation is different, but there is an intense urge for greater racial and gender diversity, especially as social media has intensified race debates. In Trump's United States, the Black Lives Matter movement achieved massive results and inspired millions to take to the streets especially in 2020, when the brutal murder of George Floyd, a 46-year old Black man, by a White police officer was recorded and posted online.

The book industry and literary studies have not been unaffected by this urge. As Damrosch notes, "no shift in modern comparative study has been

greater than the accelerating attention to literatures beyond masterworks by the great men of the European great powers” (2006, p. 43) and “more and more works of world literature are now favored for displaying specific ethnic identity or cultural difference” (2003, p. 187). Penguin Random House UK has launched the program “Books for everyone, by everyone”¹⁰ to accelerate the publication of books by racial and gender minorities to reflect the diversity of Britain. In 2018, Penguin Random House U.S. formed a Diversity and Inclusion Council and partnered with the NGO We Need Diverse Books to create affirmative action initiatives such as the Black Creative Fund for black authors seeking publication.¹¹ In addition, racial or gender narratives in film and publishing are becoming potential best-sellers and award-winning, as authors like Tommy Orange, Rupi Kaur, and even the Brazilian Geovani Martins attract interested publishers.¹²

In the twenty-first century, Machado has also become the subject of race-related studies in North American literary criticism as new meanings emerge for his work in the Anglophone context. As a historical character, Machado was Whitened in Brazil. Yet recent Brazilian Black movements have made his racial background an important factor to acknowledge. This emphasis has also appeared more in English publications on/by Machado as scholars such as Dixon and Daniel challenge the idea that Machado, despite being an African Brazilian, did not touch on racial issues.

Damrosch argues that literature succeeds abroad when it adds to the understanding of a host culture’s own literary tradition. Studies like those by Dixon or Daniel, which position Machado as an African Brazilian writer whose work is important to the history of African Diasporic literature, add a new layer of international appeal to his work. While the importance of that work is far from being determined solely by race, that the most important writer in a nation marked by complex race relations is an African Brazilian is an extraordinary achievement,

10. The program is detailed on the “Creative Responsibility: Inclusion” page of the Penguin Random House website: <<https://www.penguin.co.uk/company/creative-responsibility/Inclusion.html>>.

11. See “Social Impact” by Penguin Random House: <<https://social-impact.penguinrandomhouse.com/>>.

12. Orange, an author of Native American background, has become a best-selling author with his novel *There, There* (2018), which was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize; Kaur is an Indian feminist poet, and a number-one New York Times best-seller; even before it was published, Martins’ short-story anthology *O sol na cabeça*, which brings stories on African Brazilian characters in Brazil’s favelas, had already been sold to nine different publishing houses around the world.

especially during Machado's lifetime. Indeed, it may have been expedient for Machado to subdue one racial component to the other in his public life to survive in a society where Whiteness was a source of privilege and Blackness a source of shame. Yet by defying his milieu, Machado produced a literature of the highest quality with a considerable level of erudition. This, alongside a deeper discussion of how race appears in his works, can definitely make space for Machado on the world literary stage. His case is, if not the only one, one of the few of its kind.

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