

he says it was, and he fails to provide a specific definition of the state and thus a standard by which to measure its relative strengths or weaknesses. It is difficult to imagine that the succession of earthquakes, wars and political chaos throughout the nineteenth century were as innocuous as he claims. Even if political rivals shared common goals, changeovers in office had patronage consequences and thus disruptive effects on the state bureaucracy.

One of the compelling consequences of Acosta's study is the way it creates odd historiographic bedfellows. It implicitly unites laissez-faire economic elites with progressive-leaning historians. Acosta is highly critical of the former and sees their claims about their beneficent role in Salvadorean history as unfounded and morally repugnant. Acosta's fellow historians tend to agree with him, but he sees them as promoting a similarly flawed story, a weak state and a poor nation until the coffee elites came along in the late nineteenth century and changed everything.

Furman University

ERIK CHING

J. Lat. Amer. Stud. 47 (2015). doi:10.1017/S0022216X15000528

G. Reginald Daniel, *Machado de Assis: Multiracial Identity and the Brazilian Novelist* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), pp. xi + 338, \$74.95, hb.

Increasingly, over the last 10 or 20 years, critics have taken an interest in Machado de Assis's racial origins, and in the effect they may have had on his career, his opinions and his writings. We know that he was the child of a father described as 'pardo, forro', and a Portuguese mother, from the Azores. In 2007, Eduardo de Assis Duarte published his *Machado de Assis afrodescendente*, which documents most of the references to the matter, and more generally to slavery and its effects, in the works, novels, stories *crônicas*, and so on.

It is a complex topic: we have little or no unambiguous evidence of what this most ironic and secretive writer thought about the colour of his skin, though we can have little doubt that he would have smiled with a certain amount of bitterness (and who knows, some perverse satisfaction) at the description of his colour as 'branco' on his death certificate.

G. Reginald Daniel's book is certainly the longest treatment of the subject, and perhaps the most comprehensive. A great deal is given over to discussions of the contexts, historical and theoretical, which surround it. The first chapter deals with the history of miscegenation in Brazil since 1500, the second with other mulatto writers before Machado and contemporary with him (Caldas Barbosa, Luís Gama, José do Patrocínio, Lima Barreto); in the third Machado's life is recounted in some detail. It is a faithful account, though with some mistakes. Machado did not translate *Oliver Twist* from English, as Jean-Michel Massa proved, nor is it necessarily true that he suffered from epilepsy all his life. The first of two stories entitled 'Mariana' is twice given the date 1864, instead of 1871 (the year of the Law of the Free Womb). There is no series of *crônicas* entitled *Crônicas do relojoeiro* signed 'Policarpo'. José Galante de Sousa's *Bibliografia de Machado de Assis* is, astonishingly, missing from the very extensive bibliography. Some important and relatively unknown facts, however, are there, like Gonçalves Crespo's 1871 hesitant letter saying he has heard he is an 'homem de cor'. Large parts of the later chapters are given over to accounts of other writers (Graça

Aranha, for instance, and Euclides da Cunha) and other issues which sometimes have no real connection to Machado (negritude, for instance).

The heart of Daniel's argument appears in Chapter 5, where he states that Machado was a 'meta-mulatto': '[he] endeavored to go beyond the physical limitations of being a mulatto 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' (pp. 120–1). Machado, it is argued, aspired to a kind of 'racelessness' (p. 120), or wrote a 'black song without color', in the words of Richard L. Jackson (p. 152).

It is a daring argument, attractive in some ways. Not least, as Daniel says, in removing any sense of inferiority from the mulatto, a prejudice present in odd moments even in some of Machado's most respectable critics. But it is also dangerous in its extrapolation from the particular case (miscegenation) to the general: duality comes in many guises, and has many causes. How can we know what effects his 'mulatto-ness' had on his writing? No doubt Machado is fascinated by 'the conflicts, paradoxes and contradictions of human nature', so are many (most?) great writers. It would be easier (though possibly no truer) to attribute some of Machado's perceptions to his intermediate class status as a dependent or *agregado*, as Roberto Schwarz and others have persuasively argued. In this latter case, there is plenty of proof: unfortunately for Daniel's argument, it is very difficult to make the same kind of causal argument, for sheer lack of evidence, the word 'mulato' makes virtually no appearance in his work (I can only think of one case of a 'mulatinha alta e elegante' in 'A parasita azul'). Machado himself did not think he was particularly handsome, as he says of himself deprecatingly in a *crônica* of 1894, 'a vista é pouca e a beleza nenhuma'. What did he think when a reviewer of *Helena* said that he was a 'feio candelabro que emite vivíssima luz'?

To my mind, this difficulty vitiates a good deal of the book: the duality of various kinds (irony, for instance) that Daniel encounters in the works is just that: duality, and no real argument is presented to attribute its presence to Machado's skin-colour or racial origins. The accounts of the novels are in general disappointingly conventional and again feed into the same general argument of doubtful solidity.

It is a relief when a text is discussed which actually does refer to racial origins, though, even so, obliquely and between the lines. This is 'Um homem célebre', certainly a candidate for Machado's best short story, published in 1888, the year of Abolition. One of the most original and stimulating articles to have been written on Machado, José Miguel Wisnik's 'Machado maxixe', pulls evidence together from diverse sources, from Machado's minor works, from musical history, and so on, to reveal his awareness, for instance, of the insistent African undertow in Brazilian popular music (polkas and so on) of apparently impeccable European origins. The article is summed up on pp. 184–7, as part of an argument that Machado tried to 'transcend race' in his account of national identity: but the same difficulties in extrapolating from one area to another are present here.

I have to admit that, much as I sympathise with Daniel's aims in this book, it seems to me to be more an illustration of the difficulties of generalising arguments based on too little evidence, than an illuminating discussion of a fascinating problem.

University of Liverpool

JOHN GLEDSON