

Literary and Cultural Circulation: Machado de Assis and Théodule- Armand Ribot*

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This paper's argument is that in the case of Ibero-America, the literary or cultural insertion of elements from other places is not only or predominantly determined by the meaning that the element had in its supposed place of origin, but, rather, by the specific context where this element is subsequently placed. It is the study of this context that can generate better explanations not only about the reasons for this (and not another) element having been 'imported' but also about the meaning that it will have in the new context, in connection with the other elements that are also present there. After giving some answers from a selected number of scholars to the question of how does a given literary or cultural element, with an assumed origin in a given context, insert itself in another context, this paper will present, as a case study, the supposed 'importation' by Machado de Assis of the ideas of Théodule-Armand Ribot, demonstrating that the Brazilian author did not reproduce 'imported' elements, maintaining them in the terms in which they were articulated in the work of the French writer in their original context, but rather transformed them into something else.

Introduction

How does a given literary or cultural element, with an assumed origin in a given context, insert itself in another context? The theory proposed here, which is inspired by Santiago¹ and Espagne,² amongst others, is that in the case of former colonies, such literary or cultural insertion is not only or predominantly determined by the meaning that the element had in its supposed place of origin, but, rather, by the specific context where this element is subsequently placed. It is the study of this context that can generate better explanations not only about the reasons for this

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(and not another) element having been ‘imported’ but also about the meaning that it will have in the new context, in connection with the other elements that are also present there. In this argument, the author will illustrate how some conceptual terms from Literary Studies, such as imitation, originality, autonomy, influence, imitation, transculturation, and transference, amongst others, in some way relate to this question.

We begin by synthesizing some Latin American perspectives on this subject, and then address the Brazilian context, proposing more general hypotheses. Finally, as a case study that proves the usefulness of the argument proposed in this paper, the case will be presented of the supposed ‘importation’ by Machado de Assis of the ideas of Théodule-Armand Ribot, demonstrating that the Brazilian author did not reproduce ‘imported’ elements, maintaining them in the terms in which they were articulated in the work of the French writer in their original context, but rather he transformed them into something else, in order to produce a humorous critique of those very elements.

Theories about Literary and Cultural Circulation

Attempts to theorize what happens when cultural elements that supposedly come from another place are incorporated into a given society are always problematic and complex. Such attempts have given rise, over the years, to heated debates and the emergence, continuation, alteration or substitution of conceptual terms, which in a particular way engaged with and related to certain existing references at a given historical moment, sometimes even generating apologies for doing so.

When Fernando Ortiz Fernández (1881–1969), in his classic work *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* (*Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, 1940) used the term *transculturation* for the first time, he apologized for the neologism and explained that his intention was to replace, at least in part, the term *acculturation*, which, at that time, was gaining currency in anthropological terminology:

We chose the word *transculturation* to express the extremely varied phenomena that originate in Cuba as a result of the highly complex transmutations of cultures that can be found there, without the knowledge of which it is impossible to understand the evolution of the Cuban nation, both in its economic aspect and in the institutional, juridical, ethical, religious, artistic, linguistic, psychological, sexual and all remaining aspects of national life.³

In the case of the arrival of the Spanish in Cuba, Ortiz draws attention to the fact that they were removed from their original environment and transplanted to the New World, as later waves of Africans from all coastal areas would also be, along with indigenous people from the continent, Jews, Portuguese, Anglo-Saxons, French, North Americans and even Chinese from Macau, Canton and other regions. For Ortiz, every immigrant in the New World was transformed into an individual uprooted from his native land, who experienced a critical dual-edged moment of ill-adjustment and re-adjustment, of *disculturation* or *exculturation*, of *acculturation* or *inculturation*, and finally, a process of synthesis or *transculturation*. He argued that

transculturation amounted to this process of syncretism which, in turn, was a product of the encounter in Cuba between these different cultures, transplanted in the New World, where, both for those who were arriving and for those who were already there, there would have to be a re-adjustment in order to adapt to the local circumstances, which were also altered by the impact of this cultural encounter.

The Uruguayan critic Angel Rama (1926–1983) responded with a theoretical critique of Ortiz's work in the form of the publication *Writing Across Cultures: Narrative Transculturation in Latin America* (1982). He drew attention to the fact that, amongst other factors, the idea of originality in the literature of the Americas, after Romanticism, was akin to the notion put forward by Andrés Bello, namely an originality that stemmed from the representativeness of the region from which the literature emerged, since it saw itself as different from the society of the colonial power, whether as a result of the physical environment or ethnic composition, or whether because of its different stage of development in relation to what was considered the only model of 'progress': the European model.⁴

Rama, in reference to the early-twentieth-century 'regionalists', emphasizes the way in which *transculturation* occurs via the incorporation of 'external' elements of modernity, which are processed when they come into contact with elements from the local milieu, thus resulting in a hybrid that is capable of continuing to transmit a local inheritance, but is re-invigorated by the addition of new elements:

In the realm of the arts in the 1920s and 1930s this process takes place in all aesthetic currents and most clearly in the diverse narrative developments of this period. The Carpentier who, on hearing the dissonances of Stravinsky's music, sharpens his hearing to rediscover and then give value to the African rhythms that in the small black village of Regla, across the bay from Havana, had been heard for centuries, was not an exceptional case. Nor was Miguel Ángel Asturias who, dazzled by the *écriture automatique* of the Surrealists, considers that it serves to re-discover the poetry and thinking of the indigenous communities of Guatemala. In the same vein, when examining *Macunaíma*, Gilda de Mello e Souza shrewdly puts forward the hypothesis of a dual source, symbolically expressed in the poet's line ('I am a Tupi Indian plucking a lute'), in order to understand the work: 'The value of the book thus stems, to a large extent, from this "simultaneous adherence to entirely heterogeneous terms" or rather, from a curious satirical interplay that oscillates in an uninterrupted manner between the adoption of the European model and the valorization of national difference.'⁵ (Ref. 4, p. 29)

Antonio Candido, in a famous essay from 1969, wrote that, in the choice of expressive tools with which to create literary works, there is always a degree of dependency in relation to what is already in circulation, and to the hierarchies of an international system in which 'source-countries' generate, in his view, a dependency. This dependency, in his opinion, when considered in relation to the works produced by the 'dependent', is 'a form of participation in and contribution to a cultural universe to which we belong, which goes beyond nations and continents, permitting the reversibility of experiences and the circulation of values.'⁶

Candido was highly critical of a certain kind of nationalism which – principally in its nineteenth-century variants – ardently desired absolute autonomy and originality and displayed a tendency to want to wipe out the vestiges of remaining cultural links, dreaming of impermeable creative environments from where works free of what were considered ‘external’ or ‘foreign’ contacts and influences would supposedly emerge. In line with this view, in the same essay from 1969, Candido stated:

We know, then, that we are part of a wider culture, in which we participate as a cultural variant. And that, contrary to what our grandparents sometimes naively believed, it is an illusion to talk of suppressing contacts and influences. If only because, at a time when the law of the world is that of inter-relation and interaction, utopias of isolationist originality no longer underpin patriotism, understandable in a phase of recent national formation, which demanded a provincial and umbilical position. (Ref. 6, p. 154)

It is no coincidence, then, that one of Candido’s favourite colleagues, Roberto Schwarz, wrote a famous text about the circulation of ideas, significantly entitled ‘Misplaced Ideas’, which dealt with the importation of liberal European ideas and their embedding in nineteenth-century Brazil, a context in which these ideas (if taken in their original European sense), he argued, entered into open contradiction with a social system that was still dominated by rural landowners and slavery, giving rise to an ‘ideological comedy’.⁷

It is equally no accident that the writer examined by Schwarz in the book where this text appears is Machado de Assis, also examined years later in another book by a younger critic, João Cezar de Castro Rocha,⁸ who studies the more than five decades of Machado’s oeuvre, spread across diverse literary genres, identifying the presence of recurrent themes, the transformation of their treatment, and the dialogues established with western literature. Rocha confirms that Machado de Assis’s work does not employ reiteration of the same elements, but rather the innovative appropriation of pre-existing literary traditions.

Extending this notion to a wider context, Silviano Santiago, in an essay originally written in 1971, states that Latin America establishes its place on the map of western civilization thanks to a movement that gives new meaning to the pre-established elements that the Europeans exported to the New World (Ref. 1, p. 5). In Santiago’s view, the practice of permanently looking for sources and influences, entrenched in academia, restricts itself to mistakenly emphasizing a supposed lack of imagination among cultural producers who are allegedly obliged, due to a lack of home-grown traditions, to appropriate models put in circulation by the colonial power. This emphasis, he argues, reduced the creations of Latin American cultural producers to the condition of ‘parasitic’ works, because they fed off others without adding anything of their own, thus drawing on the likely brilliance and prestige of the source.

According to Santiago, the Latin American text, as a second text, is organized on the basis of a silent and unfaithful meditation on the first text, and the reader of that first text, when transformed into a writer, is proactive:

... he tries to expose the original model in its limitations, in its weaknesses, in its lacunae, disarticulating and re-articulating it in accordance with his intentions, according to his own ideological direction, his vision of the theme initially presented by the original. The writer works on another text and almost never exaggerates the role that the reality that surrounds him can represent in his work. In this sense, the criticisms that are often leveled at the alienation of the Latin American writer, for example, are pointless and even ridiculous. If he only talks about his own life experience his text goes unnoticed by his contemporaries. It is necessary that he first learn to speak the language of the colonial power in order to subsequently combat it better. The work of literary critics should above all be characterized by an analysis of the use that the writer makes of a text or of a literary technique that belongs in the public domain, of the advantage he takes of it, and this analysis should be completed by a description of the techniques that the same author creates in his aggressive advance on the original model, breaking down the foundations that held it up as a unique object that was impossible to reproduce. The imaginary, in the realm of neocolonialism, can no longer be that of ignorance or naivety, fed by a simplistic manipulation of the information offered by the immediate experience of the author, but rather will increasingly consolidate itself as one piece of writing created on top of another. The second work, since it in general entails a critique of the previous one, asserts itself with the demystifying violence of anatomical charts that strip bare the architecture of the human body. (Ref. 1, p. 70)

As far as more wide-ranging proposals are concerned, which insert culture and literature into larger contexts, it is also important to acknowledge Benjamin Abdala Jr.'s contribution to theoretical perspectives on the circulation of ideas. He proposes a comparative approach that can extend our knowledge of the different historical processes that societies go through, 'in a rough dialogue involving the literatures of all regions, where we discuss what we have in common and how we differ'.⁹ Abdala Jr. considers a socio-cultural awareness of the place where the critic is situated imperative to literary criticism, because it is from this place of access to network dynamics, tending towards supranationality, that he speaks, and it is from this place that one can seek to overcome purely localistic attitudes, contributing towards communal engagement with greater political reach, since they are based on historical experience rooted in the place where they are created. (Ref. 9, pp. 48–49).

For pragmatic reasons, Abdala Jr. believes that the first stage of such communal engagement can take place within a Luso-Afro-Brazilian context, since there is a history of cultural and literary circulation.¹⁰ He also gives priority to the Iberian literary context, with an emphasis on Latin America, where such engagement involves diverse blocks of countries, with common interests.

Thus, as we have seen, in the various dimensions of the theoretical reasoning involved in their respective works, to some extent all these theoreticians have included among their interests the ways in which a given literary or cultural element, with an alleged origin in a certain place, inserts itself in another place. All of them, therefore, have sought to reflect on what is at stake in literary and cultural circulation.

What is at Stake in Literary and Cultural Circulation

In the case of the literature and culture of former colonies, it is very common to keep searching for elements in the supposed European 'place of origin', which are then allegedly 'imitated'. This can give rise to interesting and sometimes justifiable work, but the problem is that frequently the researcher remains so fixed on the supposed 'origin' that he does not give due attention to the new reception context of the elements in question. However, we know that the same element does not maintain an absolute identity and can be transformed into something other by engaging with and establishing relationships with different elements in the new context. This can occur in many different ways and with varied types of cultural products.

If, for example, Surrealism in Brazil was imported from Europe, we must not restrict ourselves to investigating what the movement signified in its supposed 'place of origin' when we discuss Brazilian literary works and authors whose point of reference is that literary movement. Rather, we must also research the reasons, interests and motivations of the Brazilian literary and cultural producers who chose to receive what suited their own needs and interests.

In the first series of his *Retratos relâmpago* (*Lightning-Pictures*), the poet Murilo Mendes states: 'I embraced Brazilian-style Surrealism, taking from it what most interested me: as well as many chapters from the nonconformist manual, the creation of a poetic atmosphere based on the bringing together of disparate elements'.¹¹ Taking what is most of interest to him, the Brazilian writer, Murilo Mendes, writing in the present, forms a relationship with the European movement (Surrealism) of the past, going on to establish what is important or what is relevant from that past for the present day. This can also serve to legitimize projects for the future. Such projects can be for a future seen as 'different' (when we specify something in the past that we want to avoid or do not want to repeat) or as 'derivative' (when we want to stress the continuity of something that was valued in the previous creative context).

To provide further examples, this time in the realm of the visual arts, at the time of writing this paper the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York is holding an exhibition entitled 'African Art, New York, and the Avant-Garde', which brings together works from the museum's own collection and others on loan from other museums and collections. The exhibition includes almost 40 wooden sculptures from Central and West Africa, alongside photographs, sculptures and paintings by Alfred Stieglitz, Charles Sheeler, Pablo Picasso, Francis Picabia, Diego Rivera and Constantin Brancusi. According to the *New York Times*, the idea is to remind us of the connections between European modern art and African art, and to point out that North Americans received modern art and African art at one and the same time as 'imports' from the French and Belgian colonies, distilled in Paris and presented on North American soil by a small number of trend-setting dealers and collectors.¹²

If we think about African art as having influenced, as being imitated by, or being the source of inspiration for European artists, and artists from other continents being subsequently influenced by, imitating or having as their source of inspiration

those European artists who had previously been influenced themselves, we become aware of a complex situation of cultural circulation.

In the case of this exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, according to the *New York Times*, the aim is to show that the world of African art in New York, in the first half of the twentieth century, was a small one and directed towards the market:

It [the world of African art in New York] remained so even well into the Harlem Renaissance, when the philosopher Alain Locke assembled an exhibition of African sculpture with the intention of inspiring African-American artists and founding a museum of African Art in Harlem.

Titled 'The Blondiau Theatre-Arts Collection of Primitive African Art,' it was made up primarily of Congolese decorative objects owned by the Belgian Raoul Blondiau. And it prompted artistic responses like Malvin Gray Johnson's 1932 painting 'Negro Masks,' shown here alongside the Yoruba and Bwa examples that inspired it.

By encouraging Johnson and his peers to look for their roots in African artworks, Locke, the author of the anthology 'The New Negro,' was trying to move past the idea of African art as, in his words, a 'side exhibit to modernist painting.'¹²

It is interesting to note that, in some ways, this exhibition at the Met represents an analogous initiative, namely by presenting a collection of African objects that acquire meaning for visitors to the museum via their positioning alongside their western counterparts.

Calling on terminology widely used in Literary Studies, perhaps we can say that the African sculpture that was the source for western modern art went on to be considered in relation to its imitations, which, in turn, influenced other visual artists in different places.

In any event, in the North American case it is from the reception context in New York that interpretations emerged about what the 'place of origin' of those imported objects signified, drawing attention to their African roots. In the New York environment that gave rise to the famous Harlem Renaissance, the valorization of African roots would take centre stage, identifying specific features of artistic manifestations that would be seen as points of reference for an African diaspora that extended to North American territory and led to the circulation of African cultural elements in spaces and times perhaps never imagined in the original world from whence they came.

To give another example of this kind of circulation, the Brazilian *caipirinha* cocktail, when 'imported' to the former East Germany, acquired a new ingredient, an alternative to the traditional *cachaça* (sugarcane spirit), namely vodka. This new ingredient then returned to Brazil, where it circulated and even gave rise to a new variant of the cocktail, the so-called *caipiroska*.

In the case of literature, there are an enormous number of issues to consider. The first and most visible 'imported' element of literature is language itself, in the case of former colonies. One of the issues that Brazilian writers came up against after independence was how to deal with a language that still belonged to the colonial power.

It is a fact that two weeks after the Portuguese caravels set sail for the Americas, Antonio de Nebrija published in Salamanca his *Castilian Grammar*, which features a dedication to Spanish Queen Isabel, stating ‘that language has always been the companion of empire, and has followed the latter in such a way that together they were born, grew and flourished, and then together both declined.’¹³ In Portugal, both the *Gramática da linguagem portuguesa* (*Grammar of the Portuguese Language*, 1536), by Fernão de Oliveira,¹⁴ and the *Gramática da Língua Portuguesa com os Mandamentos da Santa Madre Igreja* (*Grammar of the Portuguese Language with the Commandments of the Holy Mother Church*, 1540), by João de Barros,¹⁵ were also published during the period of the Portuguese overseas expansion. Fernão de Oliveira even proposes the generalized use of the Portuguese language, arguing that the Greeks and the Romans, when they ruled the world, obliged all the peoples under their command to use the language of Greece and Rome, respectively.¹⁶

It would seem, therefore, that there is some kind of relationship between Iberian imperial expansion and the development of the technology with which to capture, gain knowledge of, and transmit a certain image of the language, configured in the volumes known as ‘grammars’, which made possible the development of a technology for dealing with, understanding and disseminating languages.¹⁷ And, as we know, language has at its very core a memory of meanings, such that its dissemination also represents the dissemination of this memory. When it boards the ships of the colonizers, this aspect joins forces with the project of those who will make use of it to carry out the colonial enterprise, in the process of establishing themselves in the new territory.¹⁸

In the case of Brazil, at the beginning of the period of colonization the predominant language was the *língua geral*, literally ‘general language’ and basically an indigenous language for which the Jesuits created a grammar. The use of this language was widespread in the colony until, in 1755, the Marquis of Pombal banned, via his *Directorio dos índios* (*Directory of Indians*), the use in Brazil of any language other than Portuguese.¹⁹

Of course, this was also the historical moment when the Jesuits ceased to be trustworthy partners for Portugal and Spain in their colonization of the Americas, and went on to enter into conflict with these two colonial powers. Consequently, stemming from the conflict of interests between the Portuguese Crown and the Jesuit order, the previous situation, in which the day-to-day use of at least two languages was accepted in Brazil, was now contested, and the *Directory of Indians* put a full stop to the issue. The *língua geral* was then stigmatized as ‘a truly abominable and diabolical invention’ by the Marquis of Pombal, and the use of the Portuguese language was presented as a civilizing force, and a means of inculcating reverence and obedience to the Crown. Thus, the idea was created that the absence of the Portuguese language would imply the absence of civilization, and that it would be good for the native population if this language was imposed as the only one, because this would help to overcome ‘the barbarism of their former customs’, transforming them into good vassals of empire.

If, in the past, the following quotation from the first Portuguese grammarian, Fernão de Oliveira, was oft cited as an expression of a certain subaltern colonialism

(‘because it is better that we [the Portuguese] teach the people of Guinea than be taught by Rome’), in the present it is perhaps more relevant to use another quotation from the same *Gramática da língua portuguesa*: ‘And let us not distrust our language, because it is men who make language, and not language that makes men’.

This second quotation from Fernão de Oliveira relates to contemporary ways of viewing the social commonality of languages. For example, the Cuban poet and thinker Roberto Fernández Retamar reminds us of the following, in relation to the Spanish language: ‘after everything, after the thousands of years that this language has been in existence, during the richest half of this period we have been developing it in common in many parts of the world, including large parts of the Americas.’²⁰ I believe that this reasoning could be extended to other languages, since effectively all the speakers of Portuguese, Spanish, English and other languages all over the planet have made and continue to make these languages what they are. This does not mean, of course, that we can ignore that within linguistic contexts there are also hierarchies and hegemonies.

Although European post-Enlightenment and Universalist ideas have had an impact on national projects (not only in Brazil), in the Americas these ‘imported’ conceptions did not have the same meaning as in their place of origin, in other words, they were not the same thing, since they were transformed by their relationship with local interests, which emphasized certain aspects of these concepts and did away with others, giving rise to new, distinct configurations. In general, the Europe that the colonies and former colonies constructed in their imaginary and in relation to which they positioned themselves, whether as heirs or deniers of this vision of the continent, is also a non-European construction, in which the supposed ‘originary’ conceptions of the Old World could be used in the past both to justify colonialism and to serve as a base for emancipatory movements.

We know that the real Portugal, France or Europe do not correspond fully to the imaginary created in relation to them in the colonies and former colonies. Neither can this imaginary be considered as something permanent or homogeneous, since it has incorporated both a certain originary image, attributing specific meanings to former and current colonial powers, and, in different times and circumstances, has included European Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment ideas as a basis for the emancipatory thinking that has given rise to decolonization movements. It is consequently not a question of the ‘real’ Portugal, Spain, France or Europe, but of the meanings attributed to these places within the reception contexts, at different historical moments in which the circulation of cultural elements has occurred. Therefore, we must examine the factors that influenced the transculturation of these elements.

The very framework within which writers and readers interpret their experiences (and the texts that they read) or direct their actions, is always in some way derived from locally rooted preconceptions, which in some way contribute to the choices made.

The formulation of new ideas about emerging national identities paid tribute to a certain creative appropriation of European concepts and ideas, although at the precise moment when these nationalist conceptions were being elaborated, during the

nineteenth century, this was not clear to those participating in this process. The language and the circumstances in which these ideas and concepts were processed, as they were filtered through local particularities and interests, gave the guiding principles chosen for the post-colonial nation-states their distinctiveness.

In the specific case of literature, the post-colonial gaze, with its aim of contesting the former colonial powers, has also given rise to the view that a supposed literary state of 'imitation' of the respective colonial power should be overcome, in order to achieve a presumed state of 'autonomy'. To some extent, this gaze has also ended up attributing to the former colonial power an absolute identity, which supposedly generated 'imitations' in other territories.²¹

The identities of the colonies were supposedly derived in the past from the absolute identity of the colonial power, and thus were identities that post-colonial states should rid themselves of. However, no identity is absolute, impermeable to other cultures, or self-sufficient. In fact, even (or principally) colonial powers are melting pots whose composition includes the contribution of the colonies. If a certain colonial gaze signified culturally valorizing what came from the colonial power and devaluing what came from the colony, we must remember that, beginning with the economy, there was a continued relationship of connection and interdependency between the two.

Now we can hear echoes of a certain line of thought, even present among Brazilian literary historians in the twentieth century, which draws on the following basic reasoning: in the colonial period, initially Brazilian literature allegedly 'imitated' Portuguese literature; then, with the arrival of independence and Romanticism, it began to develop a diction of its own, 'autonomous', 'individual', and so on.

The concept of 'mimesis' equally functioned to create the idea that the former colonies always create something *a posteriori*, in accordance with models imported belatedly from the colonial power. However, this argument overlooked a certain synchrony that has often existed within literary production, not only between the former colonies and former colonial powers, but between all of these and other nations, at different times in history.

Of course, this kind of opinion flourished in different areas of thinking. Inaccurate versions of this idea, for example, spread the notion that there were universally determined and determinable stages that societies had to reach in order to achieve 'development'. Societies that had not passed through these stages and still had not reached a level of 'progress' were thus thought to be less 'modern', and allegedly required a period of preparation, transformation and waiting in order to be recognized as 'developed'.²²

Nevertheless, as previously stated, I align myself with those who consider that a literary and cultural transference is not predominantly determined by the meaning that the 'imported' element had in its supposed place of origin, but rather by the local context in which this element goes on to be inserted. It is this context that will explain not only why this (and not another) element was 'imported' but also what meaning it will have in its new setting.

Below, I summarize how ideas taken from the so-called Science of the Mind circulated in the work of Machado de Assis. This science was adopted by several of his

writer friends, but was humorously criticized by Machado de Assis in more than one narrative. To give a brief example, I will refer to the dialogue between Machado's literary work and an important work of reference from the nineteenth century: *Les maladies de la mémoire* by Théodule-Armand Ribot, a work that could be found in Machado de Assis's library, an archive that is preserved by the Brazilian Academy of Letters in Rio de Janeiro.²³

Machado de Assis, a Reader of Théodule-Armand Ribot

In the case of Machado de Assis, I will illustrate that the supposed importing of material from Théodule Ribot's work did not result in the simple reiteration of something that already existed in Europe, but rather in the creation of works in which Machado de Assis establishes a dialogue with *Les maladies de la mémoire*, thus giving rise to a final product that often comes into direct confrontation with the terms in which Ribot was understood or wanted to be understood in his original European context. Thus, when Machado de Assis imports elements from *Les maladies de la mémoire*, following the Realist/Naturalist vogue for reading the works of the nineteenth-century Science of the Mind, he is performing a critical reading of Ribot's theses on memory, and contesting the point of view of the French psychologist, appropriating the latter's ideas for different purposes than those originally intended.

As we know, when Théodule-Armand Ribot, who lived in France between 1839 and 1916, published *Diseases of Memory: An Essay in the Positive Psychology*, he was still seeking to establish a positivist and experimental psychology, based on the 'facts', and completely different from what would come to be the standard for psychoanalysis, after Freud. In the very first chapter of *Diseases of Memory: An Essay in the Positive Psychology*, Théodule Ribot says that memory illnesses and disorders, when classified and interpreted, cease to be a collection of curious facts and amusing anecdotes: 'They appear to be governed by certain laws that constitute the very basis of memory and expose its inner mechanisms' (Ref. 23, p. 2).

By instigating the transculturation of Ribot's ideas, Machado constructs narratives in which these alleged 'laws', which Ribot claimed to have discovered, are humorously criticized and transformed into entertaining anecdotes. In this way, Ribot's ideas are not used in Machado's work in the terms in which they appear in the work *Diseases of Memory*. On the contrary, Machado uses *Diseases of Memory* to do what the Frenchman said should not be done, and to criticize the very foundation of Ribot's arguments. We will now examine how he does so in a short story, entitled *O lapso* (The Lapse), originally published in 1883.²⁴

In this story, the character Tomé Gonçalves, who belongs to a privileged social class in Rio de Janeiro, finds himself regularly forgetting to pay his debts. In order to cure him, his creditors turn to Dr Jeremias Halma, a wise Dutch doctor. This name is a mixture of the prophet Jeremiah (cited in the epigraph to the story), and the Portuguese word *alma* (soul). The passage from the Bible quoted in the story's epigraph can also be interpreted as part of the humorous tone of the narrative, given that it refers to an occasion when all the army commanders, and all the people, went

in search of the prophet Jeremiah and begged him to mediate with Jehovah, his God, on behalf of them and of those who were left, to show them the path they should follow and what they should do: 'Please listen to our request, and pray to the LORD your God for all of us who are left here. As you can see, there are only a few of us left' (Jeremiah 42: 1, 2, 3).

In the Bible, this passage is followed by an appeal to God to act as a prosecution witness against those who are asking Jeremiah for help, in case they do not do what he tells them to do: 'May Jehovah himself be a true and faithful witness against us if we do not act in accordance with everything that Jehovah, your God, sends you to tell us' (Jeremiah 42: 5).

Jeremias Halma, in Machado's story, is not God's messenger, but rather the messenger of the word of science. Those who employ him to cure Tomé Gonçalves of his 'illness' (namely, forgetting about his debts) have the same attitude towards him as those who attributed the word of God to the prophet. In the case of Tomé Gonçalves, it is the word of science that everyone treats with the same respect afforded to the word of God in the biblical passage that Machado quotes.

In fact, Tomé Gonçalves's creditors, when they meet up to deliberate about employing the services of Jeremias Halma, come out with pithy phrases referring to the situation: 'If even dead people pay up, or somebody pays for them, [...] it is not asking too much to demand the same obligation from people who are ill'; '— Pay up and cure yourself' (Ref. 24, p. 376). And the narrator, when he comments on this clandestine meeting of Tomé Gonçalves's creditors, mentions Charles Lamb, who in his work *The Two Races of Men* defends a thesis that is completely different from that of Ribot:

Charles Lamb's theory about the division of the human species into two great races comes after the secret meeting at Rocio; but no other example could illustrate it better. In fact, the dejected or fretful demeanour of those men, the despair of some of them, and the concern of all of them, already provided ample proof that the accomplished essayist's theory is true, and that of the two great human races, — that of men who lend, and that of men who borrow, — the former's sad gestures contrast with the latter's open-handed, giving manners. Thus, at the very same time, Tomé Gonçalves, having returned from the procession, was regaling some friends with wines and chickens that he had bought on credit; meanwhile his creditors, with a disillusioned and cowed air about them, were clandestinely studying ways to recover their lost money. (Ref. 24, pp. 376–377)

Called upon to intervene in this situation, the doctor Jeremias Halma, instead of diagnosing Tomé Gonçalves as having a social pathology, and deeming him as someone who consciously fails to pay his bills, takes his lead from Ribot and diagnoses him as having a mental pathology:

'There is a special illness [...], a memory lapse; Tomé Gonçalves has entirely lost the notion of paying. It is not through negligence, nor on purpose that he fails to settle his bills; it is because this idea of paying, of handing over the price of something, has completely vanished from his mind.' (Ref. 24, p. 378)

In fact, the doctor, Jeremias Halma, was probably not a reader of Charles Lamb and would have supported Ribot's thesis that memory is essentially a biological fact

and only accidentally psychological (Ref. 23, p. 1). Following this thesis, Ribot argues that a muscle becomes stronger when it is exercised more (Ref. 23, p. 4), and classifies as ‘secondary automatic acts’ those which the individual acquires and develops throughout his or her life, ranging from physical movement to learning how to do a job (Ref. 23, p. 6).

Like Ribot, doctor Jeremias Halma believes that ‘through exercise, the appropriate movements become fixed, to the exclusion of others’ (Ref. 23, p. 7). This is the reason why he takes his patient to witness scenes of people making and receiving payments, so that his memory muscles are exercised in an appropriate way and so that he can be transformed into a good payer, leaving behind his previous practice of not paying his debts:

The doctor took his patient to shoe shops so that he could see people buying and selling merchandise, and see over and over again the act of payment; he talked about the manufacture and sale of shoes in the rest of the world, he compared the prices of footwear that year, 1768 with those of thirty or forty years before; he made the shoemaker go ten, even twenty times to Tomé Gonçalves’s house to take the bill and ask for his money, in addition to a hundred other stratagems. (Ref. 24, pp. 379–380)

At the end of the short story, the doctor manages to ‘cure’ the patient, who pays all his creditors, but, in a final ironic twist, the only person who does not receive his payment, neither from the former creditors nor from the patient, is doctor Jeremias Halma himself.

Recently, as stated above, the critic João Cezar de Castro Rocha drew attention to the fact that, in Machado’s work, although there are traces of his mostly European readings, and Machado made a point of citing directly or indirectly foreign works and authors throughout his oeuvre, these features are not simply a repetition of what he read: they represent, rather, the incorporation of another’s creation in order to make it his own.²⁵

Following this same line of thought, based on everything that I have presented here in this summary, it has been possible to prove that the circulation of Ribot’s ideas through Machado’s work implies assigning new meaning to the Frenchman’s theses. In other words, Machado establishes a relationship with Ribot’s work, but does not create a shared meaning with it, and does not accept the ways in which Ribot ‘scientifically’ categorized memory illnesses. The result is a short story in which the ‘scientific’ content of Ribot’s work, as a consequence of the other elements with which it dialogues and engages, is transformed into something else in the Brazilian context.

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8. This paper restricts itself to only one short story by Machado de Assis for reasons of brevity. For a broader vision of the author's work in its entirety, see J. Cezar de Castro Rocha (2013) *Machado de Assis: por uma poética da emulação* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira), who provides a rigorous illustration of how Machado works with 'imported' elements in his work.
9. B. Abdala Junior (2012) *Literatura comparada e relações comunitárias, hoje* (Cotia: Ateliê Editorial), p. 27.
10. For example: 'Graciliano [Ramos] engages with the intellectual field that communally would give rise to the writers called neo-realists in Portugal and the African countries, where intellectual life was gaining awareness of the political situations of those countries. He himself was marked by the literary strategies of Eça de Queirós, but not only him: his fiction is suffused with Brazilian literary tradition, including Machado de Assis. It was then the turn of Portuguese writers to be marked by his literature: they discovered a socially adapted, revolutionary Eça, on a par with the reformer that they discovered in the direct reading of this classic author of Portuguese literature. In Cape Verde, this supranational circulation reached the work of Manuel Lopes, who sought to 'sink his feet' into his homeland, despite the tragedy of the droughts, in terms of literary representation. From the regional level, he thus reached the national and supranational levels, via the communal route' – B. Abdala Junior (2012) *Literatura comparada e relações comunitárias, hoje* (Cotia: Ateliê Editorial), p. 36.
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16. 'Because Greece and Rome still exist only for this reason, because when they ruled the world they ordered all the peoples under their control to learn their languages and in the latter they wrote very good doctrines, and not only did they write in these languages what they already understood, but they also transcribed into them all the things of merit that they read in other languages. And in this way they obliged us even now to work at learning and perfecting theirs, forgetting

- about our own. Let us not do that, but instead remind ourselves that the time has arrived and that now we are the rulers, because it is better that we teach the people of Guinea than be taught by Rome, even if the latter now has all its value and price
- F. de Oliveira (1507–ca. 1581) *Grammatica da linguagem portuguesa* [Fernão Doliueira]. Em Lisboa: e[m] casa d'Germão Galharde, 27 Ianeyro 1536. http://moodle.stoa.usp.br/file.php/752/avulsos/fdo_gramatica_facsimle.pdf
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 25. If the narrator of the most well-known novel by Machado de Assis declares that he wrote that work ‘with the quill of mockery and the ink of melancholy’, Rocha concludes: ‘The act of appropriating other cultures favours the critical distance necessary to write with the quill of mockery. And the awareness of his own place in the Republic of Letters gives rise to the ink of melancholy. Via the simple act of recycling tradition in an unconventional way, new elements emerge, creating the conditions necessary for far-reaching formal daring’ – J. Cezar de Castro Rocha (2013) *Machado de Assis: por uma poética da emulação* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira), (Ref. 9, p. 330).

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