BOOK CLUB | MACHADO DE ASSIS | O ALIENISTA | 18 AUG, 6.30-9PM

SPECIAL OLYMPIC EDITION

OLYMPIC LOUNGE

JOAQUIM MARIA MACHADO DE ASSIS (1839-1908)

O Alienista (1881)

translated into English as

The Psychiatrist, and Other Stories (1963)
The Alienist (1998)
The Alienist (2012)
The Alienist and Other Stories of Nineteenth-century Brazil (2013)
This novella is a must-read universal classic!

Don’t miss a very enigmatic Machadian clue - ‘Casa de Orates’ - in the very title of the first chapter! .... somewhat lost in the English translations (of course!)

In the company of Dona Evarista, visit the magnificent sites in the most splendid capital city in the world – Rio de Janeiro of everyone’s fancy since 19th century to 2016 Rio Olympic Games!

Dr. Bacamarte’s scientific idealism, combined with philanthropy, would match the vision of any of the contemporary British eminent reformers, e.g. Anthony Ashley-Cooper, the 7th Earl of Shaftesbury (1801–1885). &
Casa Verde echoes the vision of 19th century mental health care architects: ‘long-suffering ‘ pauper lunatics’ (the pejorative name used in Victorian times) transported into patients’ palaces set in Elysian fields.’

Consider Dr. Bacamarte’s supposition that the human spirit (mind) is a huge seashell and his ultimate aim is to see if he is able to extract the pearl, which is reason; or ‘in other words, let us demarcate once and for all the limits between reason and insanity.’

Surprise yourself as *O Alienista* is a popular history of scientific ideas on treatment of mental disorders and asylums (dating back to ancient Greece, Bagdad, Cairo, Damascus, etc)

Did you know that asylums and alienists enjoyed a boom in the 19th century England, Europe and elsewhere? *Historic England* tells us ‘A new class of medical professional, the 'alienist' (later known as a 'psychiatrist'). At first, alienists believed asylums were peaceful places where patients could be restored by 'moral treatment'. But by the end of the century, they had lost their 'therapeutic optimism' and believed that most patients were 'incurable'. The asylums contained 'chronic' and dangerous cases, and most of the inmates never left.’

A witty account of an early and unique scientific experiment in empirical psychiatry, psychological profiling & much more! Could this experiment be replicated in the 21st century?

**Available editions**

**PORTUGUESE**

*O Alienista* continues in print in Brazil to date.

**Free downloads:**

Original book format:
[http://www.brasiliana.usp.br/search?fq=dc.contributor.author%3AAAssis%2C%5C+Machado%5C+de%5C+1839%5C+1908&fq=dc.subject%3AContos%5C+brasileiros%5C+%5C+S%C3%A9c.%5C+XIX](http://www.brasiliana.usp.br/search?fq=dc.contributor.author%3AAAssis%2C%5C+Machado%5C+de%5C+1839%5C+1908&fq=dc.subject%3AContos%5C+brasileiros%5C+%5C+S%C3%A9c.%5C+XIX)


**Translated as**

- *The Psychiatrist, and Other Stories* - translated by William L. Grossman University of California, 1963
The Alienist by Matt Rowe 2012 (2 chapters available on line, and translator claims that the whole novella was to be published in July 2012 by Calypso Editions, Houston)


NB: some of the translations above are available in e-book formats.

**SHORT HISTORY OF THE BOOK AND TRANSLATIONS**

Machado de Assis started publishing *O Alienista* in the fortnightly magazine *A Estação* (Rio de Janeiro), from 15th October 1881 to 15th March 1882. From 1882, it appeared in the volume entitled *Papéis avulsos*.

*A Estação* was launched in Rio de Janeiro on 15th February 1879, published by the Belgian owners of the bookshop and printing house Lombaerts & Cia., managed by the Belgian Jean Baptiste Lombaerts (1821-1875) and his son, Henri Gustave Lombaerts (1845-1897), (established at no. 7 Rua dos Ourives, Rio de Janeiro). The magazine was printed in Europe and distributed in Brazil. Literary works by Machado de Assis, Arthur Azevedo, Olavo Bilac, Júlia Lopes de Almeida, Luiz Murat, Raymundo Corrêa to mention but a few were published there.
Insanity and reason feature in Machado’s novels and our book club members, who, have been coming to meetings of the Brazilian Bilingual Book Club will probably remember how these themes recur in *Quincas Borba* (1891) and *Dom Casmurro* (1899) and *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas* (1881), the latter published in the same year in which he published *O Alienista*. Machado was a major Shakespearean reader and disseminator of his timeless universe of ideas in 19th century Brazil, bequeathing a Shakespearean treasury in his oeuvre. Needless to say, meditation on what insanity, madness and normality really are.

The debates about means to accommodate people with mental disorders, who used to wander abandoned in the streets in late 18th century Brazil (as elsewhere in the world, US & Europe) was made even more urgent in early 19th century. From 1830s, inspired by the arguments of the French doctors Philippe Pinel (1745-1826), Jean Etienne Dominique Esquirol (1772-1840) and other doctors, moves were made to build an adequate place able to treat and care for psychiatric patients. It was the Santas Casas de Misericórdia (alms houses and hospitals) and other religious institutions that cared for such patients in Brazil. However, there had been increasing critical reports about the insalubrious conditions in which the patients were held and campaigners exerted significant social pressure. D. Pedro II (1825-1891), the Emperor of Brazil supported initiatives to improve the lives of people with mental disorders and issued a decree on July 18, 1841 creating a ‘Lunatic Palace’, the first institution in Latin America exclusively designed for mental patients, which was built from 1842 to 1852, with designs by leading contemporary architects in a neoclassical style at the Saudade Beach in the city of Rio de Janeiro. Its name was Hospício de Pedro II (1841), subsequently renamed Hospício Nacional de Alienados (1890) and Hospital Nacional de Alienados (1911) and finally moved out in 1944 to other sites; the building was handed over to the University of Brazil, later the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (Praia Vermelha Campus).

We ought to be remind ourselves that Machado de Assis suffered from epilepsy, which at that time was classified as a mental illness.
‘Alienist’ is the one who treats mental illness, ‘mad doctor,’ 1864, from French ‘aliéniste’, from alienation in the sense of ‘insanity, loss of mental faculty,’ a sense attested in English from late 15th century. Until about the 19th century, doctors working with patients with mental illness were called ‘alienists’ and patients were called ‘aliens’ (notice ‘alienados’ in the renamed Dom Pedro II asylum). Patients were to be differentiated from vagabonds and vagrants. ‘Alienist’ and ‘alien’ are related — both derived from the Latin word ‘alius’, meaning ‘other’. From Latin to French, where the adjective ‘aliene’ (‘insane’) gave rise to the noun ‘alieniste,’ referring to a doctor who treats patients with mental health issues.

However, we also find ‘Casa de Orates’ in the very first chapter of *O Alienista*. Machado de Assis was very specific in the use of terms and it is interesting that the word ‘orate’ comes into Portuguese via Catalan (orat) and Spanish (orate). It is listed in the 2009 Houaiss Dictionary.

An incidental coincidence is that there actually was a Casa de Orates in Santiago, Chile, created in 1852 and where a doctor (Ramon Elgero) experimented with various treatments.

The word ‘orate’ is etymologically related to ‘aura’ (‘breeze’ in Greek), which in medicine refers to a peculiar symptom, a sensation preceding the appearance of more definite symptoms, for example, in epilepsy before the seizure giving a warning sign to the sufferer. The study of auras is found very early in medicine and it was Galen of Pergamon (*Aelius Galenus* or *Claudius Galenus* Κλαύδιος Γαληνός; 129 AD – c. 200/c. 216).

**Translations**
The first translation, under the title *The Psychiatrist*, dates back to 1963, reprinted in 2012 under the title *The Alienist*, by William Leonard Grossman (?-1980), who was one of the lecturers, who came at the invitation of the Brazilian Ministry of Aeronautics, and a founder member of and lecturer in air transport economics at the Instituto Tecnológico de Aeronáutica (Technological Aeronautics Institute /ITA) at the Centro Técnico de Aeronáutica in São José dos Campos. He also headed the ITA Economics and Transports Departments. He was an economist, Harvard graduate and had a law degree from University of New York. He had published various books on air transport before arriving in Brazil [*Air Passenger Traffic 1947, Ocean Freight Rates 1956 and Fundamentals of Transportation 1959*] and published in various journals and was a member of the Transportation Research Forum de Nova York. He died in 1980. On 15 April 2011, the ITA Air Transport Laboratory was renamed - LABTAR Prof William L Grossman (http://www.ita.br/labs/labtar).

W. L. Grossman fell in love with Brazilian literature and translated Machado de Assis and Jorge Amado into English. It was at ITA that he translated *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas*. In the foreword of the first translation published in Brazil, he remarks that the work had already been translated into French, Spanish and Italian and that ‘its translation into English has been long overdue’ and thanks Professor Arnaldo Pessoa, who ‘went through the text with me’ and to Joseph Morgan Stokes (ITA Vice-Chancellor, 1951-3, translated *Canção do exílio/Song of the Exile* by Gonçalves Dias in 1956) ‘whose discerning comments on my first draft are reflected in the final version; and W. M. Jackson Inc. which graciously authorised publication of the translation’.

Matt Rowe is a writer, editor, and translator (from Italian, Portuguese, and French) published the translation of the first two chapters in a new translation and claimed that it would be published by Calypso Editions in July 2012. Matt Rowe decides to render Dr. Simão Bacamarte as Doctor Simeon Blunderbuss, which a risky option especially if one thinks of names of key protagonists in world literature. Bacamarte (in Brazilian Portuguese derived from the French braquemard, a short double-edged sword,) refers to a firearm, blunderbuss, tromblon in French, but, in Brazilian Portuguese, bacamarte also means ‘an overweight inept person’, or ‘a thick volume/book which is useless’.

The latest translation is by John Charles Chasteen, a professor at Chapel Hill, North Carolina. His university website brings the following profile:

‘John Charles Chasteen is a cultural historian of Latin America whose work has explored topics ranging from gaucho knife fights and guerrilla insurgencies to the history of carnival and popular dance. His research interests center chronologically on the nineteenth century and extend geographically to Brazil, the Caribbean, and the Río de la Plata. His persistent theme in half a dozen books has been the development of Latin American nationalisms and national identities. Chasteen is currently at work translating a volume of short stories by the renowned nineteenth-century Brazilian author Joaquim Machado de Assis. http://history.unc.edu/people/faculty/john-charles-chasteen/

His translation deviates from the original in various sections and often simplifies the language of Machado de Assis and/or edits out certain key sections. Equally, for some reason, 8 short stories appear (but not those from the original Papéis Avulsos) before The Alienist in spite of the fact that the title brings The Alienist first. Each short story and the novella is preceded by a summary, which seems to be aimed at some of category of student (?) rather than a regular reader, who does not really need an abstract of a short story – just a proper good translation. His introduction contains factual inaccuracies regarding immigrants in Brazil and questionably categorizes Herbert Spencer as positivist, and includes some tired 20th century clichés.

As with all other novels and observations of our book member regarding introductions (always a point of view from a specific standpoint in time), we reiterate
our regular advice for all readers to skip the introduction and summaries and just read the translation.

*O Alienista* was also translated into German (1953, 1978), Spanish (1974, 2000), French (1992, 2005) and Italian (no date). There are various adaptations of this novella to cinema, graphic format and other formats including audio-books.

**BIOGRAPHY**

**JOAQUIM MARIA MACHADO DE ASSIS**

(1839-1908)

A portrait of Machado de Assis by Henrique Bernardelli (1858-1936) – c. 1905 Brazilian Academy of Letters Collection

*From our earlier Book Club postings (January and October 2015 and 2016)*

**ON THE 106TH ANNIVERSARY OF MACHADO DE ASSIS’S DEATH**

October 2, 2014 in LITERATURE.

‘Há coisas que melhor se dizem calando’

‘Some things are better said by remaining silent’

Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis, (21st June 1839, Rio de Janeiro – 29th September 1908, Rio de Janeiro) is the most celebrated classic Brazilian writer, thinker and a social critic. A true man of genius, he wrote poetry, novels and short-stories, plays, chronicles, translations (including Oliver Twist by C. Dickens), parliamentary reports, economic outlook articles and much more. His insights into the life and times of 19th century Brazil permeate all of his works. A classic master of Brazilian and world literature covertly brought some of leading European and universal ideas to Brazil.
An extraordinary man of letters of mixed race and an immense capacity to respond to the challenges that life presented him. Many are the similarities between Machado de Assis’s and Charles Dickens’ childhood and youth, both living in the 19th century capitals Rio de Janeiro and London. Both had to start work early and amassed their vast knowledge through unwavering determination. Machado de Assis also had to live with epileptic seizures, misunderstood in medical circles in 19th exerting adverse effects on social wellbeing. He became a printer’s apprentice at the age of 17 and taught himself various languages and mastered universal literature. He had a keen interest in music and excelled as a chess player. He would start writing very early, become an exemplary civil servant and remained happily married to a cultured woman, Carolina Augusta Xavier de Novais. He was a founder member and was elected as the first president of the Brazilian Academy of Letters. In 1908, he would receive a state funeral.
In addition to leaving a legacy of superlative novels and short stories, poems, plays and chronicles, Machado de Assis bequeathed some of the deepest appraisals of the values and attitudes of the societies of 19th century Rio reflecting a keen sense of ethics. Machado’s oeuvre is timeless. It is also inter-textual – there is a dialogue between author and narrator with texts from Antiquity, the Fathers of the Church, science treatises and literature. His dialogue with the reader/interlocutor fits well into many a speech act theory and can illustrate fascinating aspects of human understanding. The topics and ideas that appear in his poems and plays and chronicles later reappear in his novels – they constitute the ab ovo of subsequent full-fledged narratives, creating thus an internal dialogue, intertextuality of a very original kind foreshadowing much modern writing.

His influence on literature both in Brazil and elsewhere remains a source of inspiration for many. Susan Sontag once referred to him as the greatest writer ever produced in Latin America surpassing even Borges. Harold Bloom went further describing him as ‘the supreme black literary artist to date’ (in Genius, 2002). Salman Rushdie remarked that ‘If Borges is the writer who made Garcia Marquez possible, then, it is no exaggeration to say that Machado de Assis is the writer who made Borges possible’. The influence that Machado the Assis has had on Jorge L. Borges has more often than not been neglected. Louis de Bernières is another author that reads Machado. There are many more.

Works on Machado abound and yet little of what he actually wrote is read by many and in many languages. His Dom Casmurro, The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas, Quincas Borba have features of timeless universal literature akin to the greatest authors of all times. Scholars have more often than not tried to classify his works as realist, romantic or fit them into a fixed category or methodological frameworks but have failed invariably as the distinguishing features of his oeuvre extend beyond such models. Translations of his works into English need to deliver the inherent quality of both his exquisite use of Brazilian Portuguese and his true genius – not an easy task. The British Library holds more than 300 copies of various works by Machado de Assis including some of his earliest works acquired in the 19th century, reflecting the interest that his works attracted at the time.

His works are universal and ought to be read and/or re-read and treasured in every library.

By Nadia Kerecuk
You may also find this BBC Radio Scotland programme by Mark Rickards broadcast in January 2015 relevant and one of our book club members, David Acton, reads excerpts from *The Posthumous Memoirs of Bras Cubas*, and the Brazilian Bilingual Book Club Convenor speaks on Machado’s œuvre available at: 
http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02gthsd

More details about the Magazine: 
https://bndigital.bn.br/artigos/a-estacao-jornal-illustrado-para-a-familia/

**BIOGRAPHIES (selection):**

The Brazilian Academy of Letters has a link to the site with various archival materials:

http://www.machadodeassis.org.br/

**JOSÉ GALANTE SOUSA** (1913-1986) remains one of the main scholars and biographers of Machado de Assis with *Bibliografia de Machado de Assis* (1955), as *Fontes para o estudo de Machado de Assis* (1958) & *Cronologia de Machado de Assis* (published in 1958 – *Revista do Livro*, and republished in *Cadernos de Literatura Brasileira* of the Instituto Moreira Salles)

**FRANCISCO DE ASSIS BARBOSA** (1914-1991) Another excellent albeit short biography in the form of an essay written in 1988 as an introduction to the collection of 17 books on Machado de Assis printed by Machado’s editor Livraria Garnier (Rio de Janeiro e Belo Horizonte): *Machado de Assis – Vida e Obra: Parábola Perfeita*. The essay appears in *Ressureição* (part of Coleção de Autores Célebres da Literatura Brasileira pages 11-52). This collection of the Machado de Assis works is one of the very best in terms of quality of the texts vis-à-vis original sources and deserves to be used by scholars to verify textual variations of various extant editions of Machado de Assis.

**WILSON MARTINS** (1921-2010), a most distinguished intellectual/cultural historian and literary critic, has not written a biography of Machado de Assis, but volumes four and five of his *História da Inteligência Brasileira* (2nd edition-1996, seven volumes published by the Secretary of Culture of the State of Paraná, an initiative and a foreword by the then Secretary for Culture, lawyer and intellectual, Dr. Eduardo Rocha Virmond) is an essential source for any Machadian and/or historian of ideas.

**DANIEL PIZA** (1970-2011) wrote a more recent biography *Machado de Assis Um gênio brasileiro [Machado de Assis: a Brazilian Man of Genius, N.K.]*, 2nd revised ed. 2006, beautifully illustrated with reprints from original sources.

**Attendance is free, but booking is essential:**

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