

## Machado de Assis and Spiritism in the Nineteenth Century: A Small Approach to "The Witch of Cosme Velho"

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** This article is the result of Postdoctoral research, carried out at Logos University International, between August 2022 and July 2023, seeking to understand man in his time together with the main vehicle of information of the period, the newspaper, the Spiritist theme and his considerations about it, **Objective:** The main desideratum aimed to seek to understand how the Spiritist theme was portrayed in the chronicles of Machado de Assis, more specifically, in the publications of the five series written by the author, between the years 1883 and 1897, for the Rio de Janeiro newspaper, *Gazeta de Notícias*, totaling 478 chronicles, all of which were read and analyzed. **Method:** The methodology adopted was the reading of these chronicles through the use of digitized sources available in the Digital Newspaper Library of the National Library and which represent a huge source of research through the website: <http://memoria.bn.br/hdb/periodico.aspx>, fully accessible via the Internet. **Results:** With the reading of the chronicles in the time frame from 1883 to 1897, it was possible to unveil an entire universe through the pen of Machado de Assis and his considerations in the face of the time in which he wrote, demonstrating his capacity and talent in the act of writing. **Conclusions:** Through the reading of the chronicles, it is possible to observe the real intransigence of Machado de Assis in the face of Spiritism, characterized through the fine ironies directed to the theme.

**Keywords:** Machado de Assis, Spiritism, *Gazeta de Notícias*.

### INTRODUCTION

"What should be demanded of the writer, first of all,  
It is certain an intimate feeling, which makes him a man  
of his time and his country, even when it deals with  
of remote subjects in time and space."  
(Machado de Assis)

Each work belongs to its time, without a doubt, therefore, by proposing to analyze the writings of Machado de Assis in a certain time cut (1883 to 1897) and within a single communication channel (*Gazeta de Notícias*), it is necessary to relate the literary work to its "time of production and to the society in which it is inserted and, thus, portrays it through different narrative arrangements and forms of representation", as it, as a work, dialogues "with culture and with the other arts, expresses the imaginary in which it is inscribed and, therefore, a worldview" (Kunz, 2020, p. 71).

Estacio (2020, p. 83) stressed on the issue of literature that it is also "a symbolic form of

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representation, it is therefore faced with a myriad of possible meanings, depending on the condition of historical subject of the actors involved in literary making".

Kunz (2020, p. 71) also warned that "literature, therefore, is related to its context of production and focuses on its time and its environment, refracting the memory and culture of which it is the fruit".

The world was in turmoil. The country was in transformation, and the Federal Capital was trying to keep up with the pace of these changes. Dolhnikoff (2017, p. 81) reported that poets and novelists wanted to talk about and portray this new universe that was unveiling, as they "were attentive to Brazilian issues, but they also wanted to dialogue with new aesthetic currents that were emerging in Europe. Among them, the most important was Machado de Assis".

Guimarães (2017, p. 27) cited some of these transformations in the scenario from 1870 onwards with the entry of "determinism, evolutionism, positivism, romanticism and naturalism – these were the keywords that, with their derivations and ramifications, would form the constellation of ideas and provide the beacons for critical activity in Brazil" and I add Spiritism itself.

Machado was aware of this in his writings. He was a man in tune with his time, and his concerns gravitated in this universe, not only in Brazil but in the world in general. His image reveals, as Bender (2020, p. 99) wrote, a man "attentive to his time, who not only describes cultural events, but uses them for the construction of the literary text, attributing to them various meanings, in addition to using them as a form of manifestation of his aesthetic positioning".

Within the long-winded Machado texts, Guimarães (2017, p. 62) added that Machado "is a master in the manipulation of literary and extra-literary references (...) with the proliferation of multiple "national" references, as attested by the history of the reception of his work, always embarrassed in questions related to the reach and domain of his literature".

Machado's productions had this characteristic of exposing a reading of social relations between the social strata of nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro, the stage for practically all his productions, although, as Kunz (2020, p. 72) exposed, this vision could be extended "to the other national elites" and the conflicts through the "contradictions and social tensions of a Brazil that was constituted by the clash between two conflicting forms, the seigniorial tradition and the desire for modernization<sup>2</sup>" (Estacio, 2020, p. 81).

In the case that interests us in particular, the relationship of Machado de Assis with Spiritism, following the social changes, he also thematized the Spiritist ascension, always

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<sup>2</sup> In order to better understand these contradictions of nineteenth-century Brazilian society, it is advisable to read the excellent book by Roberto Schwarcz (1992) – *To the winner the Potatoes*.

showing his position about the new doctrine. Thus, aiming at a better understanding of the subject, this research aims to understand man within his time and what strategies are used by the author to carry out his criticisms against spiritism when addressing the subject in the writing of each of the series.

In this way, as Spiritism went through a process of ascension in nineteenth-century Brazilian society, Machado made the doctrine a favorite theme of his chronicles, transforming the subject into a true way of making fun of Spiritists while converting the theme into a way of criticizing them.

In this matter, the press proved to be the vehicle from which such criticisms were presented, having in the Spiritist periodicals the answers in opposition to Machado's writings. Let us understand a little more about Spiritism and its importance in the nineteenth century.

Spiritism is one of the social doctrines that proliferated in the second half of the nineteenth century as one of the possible responses to the multiplural European environment. Amid the demonstrations, one can highlight utopian socialism, scientific socialism with the publication of Karl Marx's Communist manifesto, Auguste Comte's positivism, Darwin's evolutionism with *The Origin of Species*, anarchism, the scientific bias, etc..., in short, a profusion of proposals that devastated the Nineteenth Century and that led to an even greater fragmentation in the twentieth century.

In Brazil, its penetration happened very early, taking shape in the 80s of the nineteenth century. The Doctorate research, defended on March 25, 2022, demonstrated the intense debate that took place in journals, especially in the then Federal Capital of the country, Rio de Janeiro.

Reading Machado's extensive writings leads us to different points of reflection, without a doubt. The work carried out by Eduardo de Assis Duarte (2020), for example, according to the note of its third edition (p. 09) informed that the author's concern was focused on the "manifestations of Afro-descent, expressed, above all, in the textual positions regarding enslavement and interracial relations existing in nineteenth-century Brazil", having carried out an exhaustive survey, including some sources that will be the target of the current research.

In another example, Helen Caldwell (2021), the American author, exposed the English influence of William Shakespeare (1564 – 1616) in the work *Dom Casmuro*, naming our author as the Brazilian Othello, a fact also mentioned by Guimarães (2017) in chapter 03 of his habilitation thesis turned into a book.

The research carried out in the Post-Doctorate came to analyze the writings of the Brazilian novelist specifically in the newspaper *Gazeta de Notícias*, between 1883 and 1897,

with a total of 478 chronicles written in five different series, namely: "Balas de estalo" (1883-1886); "A + B" (1886); "Gazeta de Holanda" (1886-1888); "Good morning!" (1888-1889); and "A Semana" (1892-1897), because it is precisely in this periodical that the largest number of chronicles focused on the Spiritist issue are concentrated. As Chalhoub (2020, p. 202) elucidated, for those who propose to analyze a complete series, as in the case in question, they:

"they need to be analyzed in their entirety, in search of the narrator's theme, of the continuities and ruptures in his way of seeing things; each specific play or chronicle is an indivisible unit, even if woven from different fragments, because as a rule the narrator's reasoning presents a guiding thread that can be discerned, since it has regularities of vision and predictable rhetorical wiggles".

As an example of Machado's intransigence towards Spiritism and his sarcastic humor, Schwarz (2012, p. 09) in his initial observations in the book in which he dissected the novel *Posthumous Memories of Brás Cubas*, made an interesting observation about the title of the book, stating the nonsense because "the dead do not write". Well, I have to disagree completely with the author, because psychography is one of the forms of communication of the spirits, being possibly the most widespread since the beginning of the Spiritist Doctrine.

In the *Mediums' Book* (1861), which I consider the great reference of interface between the material and spiritual planes, Kardec dedicated two chapters (XIII – 198 to 202 and XV – 221 to 226) to the study of the aforementioned faculty, although there are other references in his works.

As the book is not part of the proposed analysis, I will not lengthen the subject, but the reference to the title and the development of the novel aims to mock the Spiritism so criticized by Machado, because as Schwarz (2012, p. 18) expressed, "in the Machadian novel there is practically no sentence that does not have a second intention or witty purpose".

Although the opponent of Machado de Assis' facet to Spiritism is well known, the effective hermeneutics of his texts has not yet been completely exhausted, and at this point, not only in the face of the Spiritist Doctrine, but also seeking to understand man as a fruit of his time.

## GETTING TO KNOW MACHADO DE ASSIS

We were not only young men, we were still romantics  
(Machado de Assis)

In this part, I have no intention of bringing something new and/or unpublished by Machado de Assis and his trajectory. In this sense, as Guimarães (2017, p. 14) elucidated, "the terrain of critical fortune is well mapped, so that anyone interested in obtaining references and fundamental knowledge about Machado's extensive and varied critical reception has reliable sources to turn to".

Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis was born in Rio de Janeiro on June 21, 1839, on the Livramento hill. He lived in the center, near Largo do Machado, and ended up moving in 1884 to Cosme Velho, where he lived until his denouement in 1908. His father, José de Assis, was born in Rio de Janeiro, being the son of "free" mulattoes and his mother, Maria Leopoldina Machado de Assis, was Portuguese from the Azores. Therefore, the son of a poor worker, a mestizo of black and Portuguese, he studied in public school as a self-taught, having at the age of fifteen, "a poem published with his signature in a women's fashion magazine" (Caldwell, 2021, p. 218) and, according to Leal (2006, p. 13), "the text was weak, with some commitment to Romanticism, but it was not far from the level of poetry of the new poets of the time". He dedicated himself to journalism from the age of seventeen as a typographer, extracting from his work pecuniary sustenance, but not only that.

Well, walking hand in hand with the intellectual life of the city of Rio de Janeiro, Machado made a career in public service, where, according to Leal (2006, pp. 14/15), he reached the position of assistant to the director of the Official Gazette and, soon after, in 1873, raised to the "post of first officer of the State Secretariat of the Ministry of Agriculture, Commerce and Public Works". In 1888, he received the Commendation of the Order of the Rose, and the following year, he was appointed to head the board of commerce. In 1892, he came to occupy the position of general director of transportation, and, in 1898, he was in charge "in the role of director of the Secretariat of Industry of the Ministry of Transportation", reaching the position of general director of accounting.

In the midst of all this, Machado married Carolina in 1869, although under strong pressure from the girl's family due to the epidermis of our future witch, a fact that had the obstacle removed after "two ladies from the best Brazilian society advocated Machado's cause" (Leal, 2006, p. 15).

Dolhnikoff (2017, p. 82) wrote that he was an exception in the Brazilian literate universe due to his humble social origin, but that "the originality and quality of his work made him one of the most important writers in national history", writing chronicles in several Rio de Janeiro newspapers, about literature and politics. Veríssimo (1963, p. 309) added that:

"Unlike some notable writers who began with their best works and almost exhausted themselves in them, Machado de Assis has an upward march. Each work is an improvement over the previous one. Either from the intuition of his genius, or from the influence of the particular literary milieu in which he found himself, whatever it was, he was one of the rare if not the only Brazilian writer of his time who voluntarily gave himself to the study of the language by carefully reading its best models".

Ferreira (2011, p. 316) reported that Machado's trajectory began when he joined "Paula

Brito's typography to work as a proofreader in 1854, and then participated in the writing of newspapers such as *A Marmota Fluminense*, alongside other writers of the romantic generation<sup>3</sup>, many of them published by Paula Brito", coming to work, with close ties to the press, in the "period before the beginning of the 1870s (...) starting to publish, in newspapers and periodicals, poems, critical articles, chronicles, translations and short stories of his authorship", achieving recognition at the beginning of the year 1870 (Saraiva, 2020, pp. 25/26).

Referring to the authors called romantics, Pereira (2009, p. 279) reported that "by casting their eyes on the Brazilian colonial past, the authors of romantic ideals had sought the moral basis on which the national profile should be based", a fact used by Machado until his change in 1880.

Bosi (2020, p. 88) reported that even with his inclusion in the romantic movement of the time, in fact, "Machado was the most "realistic" of the Brazilian narrators of his time; the one who most fearlessly understood and explored the spirit of the new society and most clearly inscribed it in exemplary figures and plots".

Veríssimo (1963, p. 312) added that as a poet, Machado was "the most distinguished of his prose writers and, in his domain, novelistic fiction, the greatest of our writers", bringing together in his person "qualities of expression" that no other literary man has achieved.

Saraiva (2020, p. 28) emphasized that his writings for newspapers with "varied articles, ranging from his productions to comments on everyday events and, particularly, on the political scene" demonstrated his keen "observation and criticism of the social context and developed his awareness of the mismatch between behaviors and their motivations" and "perceive the dialogue proposed by the chronicle with some of the elements that then ordered Brazilian social life" (Pereira, 2009, p. 279).

Among these comments, Machado made several notes about Spiritism. Machado (1983, p. 59) stated that "no Brazilian writer of the nineteenth century was as intransigent about spiritism as Machado de Assis", indicating that this aversion began in youth, becoming a harsh tone in maturity, only softening in old age, "almost at that moment of crossing the thresholds that give access to the other side of the mystery". Therefore, it would be natural to ask the following question: What did Machado de Assis believe? What is your religion?...

These are difficult questions to answer. Initially, this was because the author did not explicitly state any of the questions. It is known that "despite being a Catholic, Machado was not always in agreement with the authorities of the Church" (LEAL, 2006, p. 34), and his writings clearly show certain notes that confirm this assertion.

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<sup>3</sup> For more information on Romanticism in Brazil, see Machado (2001).

As Leal (2006, p. 31) pointed out, examining the religiosity of a certain author, whatever it may be, can only be verified through his works, but then we end up falling into another trap:

"a person averagely informed in Literary Theory knows that one cannot confuse the author with his characters. The author is the real person, historically and geographically determined, while the character is a fictional creature, which is to say: an invented creature."

Leal (2006, p. 32) shares the opinion that although fictional, the character is not only the result of imagination but also contains a part of the author who created it, an opinion that I certainly share. Continuing...

Maldonado (2015), when referring to Machado and his various critical chronicles against the Spiritist Doctrine, drew an important difference where the author identified that the discussion brought by Machado included not only one, but two religious models where they came to be identified later as low spiritism (Umbanda and Candomblé) and high spiritism (Kardecism).

Bosi (2012, p. 266) commenting on his works, stated that it can be divided "into two times – before and from the *Memoirs of Brás Cubas* (1881),<sup>4</sup> with the watershed in the years 1879/1880 – it is not an invention of the critics", because "he spoke of issues of his time that concerned the anguish of men, in a novel that entirely innovated Brazilian literature" (Dolhnikoff, 2017, p. 82).

Pereira (2009, p. 296), in *Brás Cubas*, emphasized that "in a society still marked by ties of dependence, the author achieves a form of literary expression of reality capable of exposing the deep truths about that world, generally hidden behind ideologies and conveniences", representing well the reported change.

Well, although the aforementioned research only begins in 1883, with the chronicles, it is worth highlighting the short story "O Espelho", published on September 8, 1882<sup>5</sup>, in the *Gazeta de Notícias itself*, which exemplifies the change in style and perspective of writing warned by Bosi (2020, p. 99), because according to the author, Machado "invests against the uncertainties of the romantic self" and "starts to be marked by an acutely ironic tone, which, turning against the bourgeois class, denounces its attachment to a world of appearances", revealing in its composition, "a reflective attitude of the reader, who must abstract the meaning of the tales

<sup>4</sup> It was initially developed in the serialization of the *Revista Brasileira*, between March and December 1880. The book came out the following year.

<sup>5</sup> ASSIS, Machado de. The Mirror. Sketch of a new theory of the human soul. *Gazeta de Notícias*. Rio de Janeiro, September 8, 1882, page 01, issue 250. Novel.

through their correlation with explicit or veiled mentions of the scope of Western culture" (Mügge and Saraiva, 2020, p. 175).

Pereira (2009, p. 273) warned that "his critical eye was capable of capturing the main challenges and impasses faced at that time by Brazilian literate circles". The change was a result presented by Machado, which also had repercussions on other authors who were then looking for a literary formula that would allow them to dialogue more directly with time. To this end, Pereira (2009, p. 275) stated that:

"Stimulated both by new aesthetic currents of European inspiration and by properly local issues and challenges, novelists and poets tried to offer their alternatives to the literary crisis they faced (...) to understand the meaning of the configuration of such a problem, the process by which different responses to the challenges presented by Machado de Assis were formulated and the consequences of this search in the literature produced in the 1880s".

Although he values the presence and instinct of nationality among the authors of his time, he does not fail to recognize the ornamental character of how it manifested itself. He criticizes, therefore, the tendency to only recognize the "national spirit" in works that "deal with local issues". For him, this tendency would be expressed contradictorily, in the case of prose fiction, in narratives increasingly distant from the reality in which their authors lived (Pereira, 2009, pp. 274/275).

Jackson (2020, p. 14) cited his observations about Machado's writing "given the influence of theater and comic opera in his works", noting that the gesture occupies "a prominent position, so much so that reading is equivalent to watching a performance of theatrical scenes, staged by the characters on the stage of a great theater in the world" and the established form of communication between the "spectator/reader through movements and gestures" (Jackson, 2020, p. 15).

Gledson (2003, p. 19) stressed "how the writer from Rio de Janeiro understands and points out the narrow links that subject Brazil to the conditioning of external dominant forces" and that, as Saliba (2006, p. 263) wrote:

"Under the gaze of his gaze, not only the gallery of types of Rio between patriarchal and modern, but the entire history of the human race was converted into a ship of the insane, a parade of ferocious selfishness or, in the best of cases, a vanity fair. Through his characters, narrative techniques, metaphorical or allegorical resources, Machado wielded, perhaps like no other, the weapons of universal suspicion and skeptical distrust, which his ingrained diplomatic character always preferred to conceal."

Machado's ironies about that type of idealized representation of the world announced not only another truth about that society, but also a new way of representing it in literature: it was

through the partiality of the points of view, the contradictions and vices expressed in Manasseh's proofs that the author began the attempt to reelaborate the relationship of literature with "his time and his country". It is not by chance that in that year that Machado de Assis would publish *Helena*, in which the romantic influence of his first productions was added to the attempt to represent the different perspectives and logics involved in the relations of domination painted in harmonious and cheerful colors by Alencar (Pereira, 2009, p. 286)

Assis had been noted for his realistic, fine, and ironic look since the end of the Empire, where he laid bare social relations marked by hypocrisy, the miseries of slavery, and generalized clientelism.

According to Gledson (2003 and 2006), for a better appreciation of Machado's opinions about society in general, the best source of analysis would be the chronicles, as they would be the expression of his most stable references, characterized in these newspaper texts, with a more direct access to the writer's thought, different, therefore, from the published books, since it is in these chronicles where the repertoire of news from which he drew his source of inspiration through customs, the institutions and the social and political issues of the period.

Bosi (2020, p. 11), specified that the main objective of the "Witch" would be centered on human behavior and that he would have achieved his desideratum through the "perception of words and thoughts, works and silences of men and women who lived in Rio de Janeiro during the Second Empire", having as a backstage, the city of Rio de Janeiro and that he would have managed to penetrate the "meanders of Rio de Janeiro society, that is, the present, already urbanized and to a certain extent modernized, insofar as it held in its core the decomposition of the slave system and imperial hegemony (Bosi, 2020, p. 151).

Chalhoub (2020, p. 213) added Gledson's information, showing that, for the analysis of these complete series to which each one belongs to a given period, it is essential to:

"reading of each chronicle as an entire piece in the context of the series, in the reading of the specific chronicler in dialogue with other chroniclers, in the vision of the chronicle genre in dialogue with other narrative genres, literary or not, also present in the pages of the periodicals in question, and outside them – seeking, in short, to conceive these literary productions as a form of intervention in the future of History".

Well, Gledson (2006, p. 101) argued that to understand Machado de Assis and his stories, they "usually insert political and historical details (...), in oblique references, whose pieces the reader has to put together and assemble, often against the sense of the narrative, at least as the narrator understands it".

In an attempt to understand such a long-winded author, in addition to the full reading of the chronicles, it is also worth typifying each character created by the author, because according

to Bosi (2020, p. 25), "as the character overcomes the typification, through the excavation of his peculiarities, it is the images and metaphors that best serve the process of representation, freeing her from the risk of the allegorizing form", a fact extended to all her created caricatures, recognizing a whole "web of social relations, whether intra-family (...), or neighbors, profession and public life among peers or between people located at different levels" (Bosi, 2020, p. 153).

These "pseudonyms could be a means of elaboration of character-narrators, whose profile was carefully constructed throughout the series – in a procedure that was very far from the casual and direct image often attributed to them" (Chalhoub et al, 2011, p. 16), as well as the title or any other resource used.

Bosi (2020, p. 38) warned of such dissociation to better understand his writings, in general, through a "two-dimensional perspective: on the one hand, the explicit narrative focus; on the other, the authorial consciousness", in which, in the first case, it would not represent the author's real thinking, omitted through a cover capable of deceiving and confusing the reader.

In the Republican period, through two works, *Dom Casmurro* (1899) and *Esau and Jacob* (1904), although outside the proposed time frame of the research, he, according to Napolitano (2016, p. 50), "portrayed the political and social dilemmas of the transition from the Empire to the Republic based on the conflicts between two brothers (...). Both competed in politics and life, under the shadow of counselor Aires, diplomat and political cadre of the Empire, a kind of narrator of the novel".<sup>6</sup>

The Brazilian Academy of Letters (ABL), founded in 1897, "ended up bringing together the most prestigious writers and intellectuals of the beginning of the Republic. The ABL was the "ivory tower" from which the literate should look at the world and, in its shelter, represent it literarily" (Napolitano, 2016, pp. 47/48). Machado de Assis, along with 29 others, was among the founding members, becoming the first president of the Institution.

Neves (2006, p. 21) portrayed that in the republican period, with the growth of the cities, poverty also grew. Machado characterized this reality well, especially in the Federal Capital, Rio de Janeiro, where "this same phenomenon can be observed and is captured by literature". Neves cited the contrast, which was used by Machado, in one of the themes of the pages of *Esau and Jacob* (1904), "between the hill of the Castle and the palaces of Rua São Clemente".

An equal fact reported by Flores (2006, p. 61), where Machado's criticism of Floriano's government was written in the book *Esau and Jacob* (1904), because Flora's death was caused by the inability to choose between the twins, one republican and the other monarchist, that

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<sup>6</sup> Machado's constant criticism of society led him to be the target of criticism and attacks, especially from Silvio Romero.

according to Flores "fiction would be as realistic as history, because more than the Republic of the Sword, it would be better to say that it was the Republic of the unforeseen", showing his disgust with the direction taken by the Republic.

Well, having outlined this small overview of Machado de Assis, let us see in the following item the form of Machado's writing style, in this case, the chronicle.

## CHRONICLE

The birth of the chronicles and their functionality would be, by definition of Machado himself<sup>7</sup>, that of dealing with tiny things, where, according to the words of Chalhoub et al (2011, p. 11), they would have "arisen by chance, from the spontaneity of a conversation" and that "would have lightness as one of their primary characteristics". They would draw their raw material from everyday affairs through small and trivial events, building a "complicity between the author and the public regarding the themes and issues to be discussed" (Chalhoub et al., 2011, p. 13).

Resende (1995, p. 11) also pointed out that chronicles were a type of "writing to be published in serials, newspapers, magazines or supplements", as it was a "literary creation linked to the immediate as the vehicle that serves as its support", and "it is precisely this sense of the provisional that gives it the lightness and an apparent lack of commitment that end up making it especially authentic".

Maldonado (2015, p. 28) reported on the extreme importance of the chronicler's work, "because the chronicles were the means used to reflect on the local and national reality, functioning as a great showcase of the events of the week and inviting readers to reflect on them".

Even with such importance, Neves (1995, p. 17) identified that only recently have historians discovered the fascinating universe of chronicles as an object of study, noting that both modern chroniclers and ancients had in common "the desire to, through the chronicle, condense the time lived in the letter".

On the issue of working with texts, especially those of nineteenth-century periodicals, Neves and Ferreira (2014, p. 295) reported that it allows us to identify:

"the meaning of the messages transmitted by the written word, emphasizing that printed matter becomes a privileged means of dialogue with the past, of creation and innovation. Consequently, the analysis of the printed materials can constitute a way of approaching the dimensions of the Brazilian State in the nineteenth century, overcoming classic dichotomies between public and private or State and Civil Society".

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<sup>7</sup> MANASSEH. Fifteen-day story. *Brazilian Illustration*. Rio de Janeiro, November 1, 1877, pages 142 and 143, issue 33.

The two authors also emphasized that for this type of analysis, "when it comes to history, it is the historian who forges them (...) to try to understand how some segments of society tried to provide answers to the problems of their time" (Neves and Ferreira, 2014, p. 295) and "whether by shock or reflection, it was clear that Brazilian literati ostensibly turned their gaze to the streets, drawing from them material for their art" (Pereira, 2009, p. 297).

For the period of analysis of the chronicles, Chalhoub (2020, p. 197) observed that it was centered on the "tradition of political customs, and other customs as well, political in a less apparent sense, therefore perhaps deeper and of greater consequences in the reproduction of social injustices" and the nature of its indeterminacy in the chronicles, makes the chronicler "always subject to the imponderable of everyday life, which both provides them with themes and problems with which to discuss and modifies and redirects their initial options" (Chalhoub et al, 2011, p. 17).

In this sense, Chalhoub (2020, p. 197) also added that the Machado chronicles of the 1880s and the subsequent decade appropriate "the satirical repertoire, in verse and prose, of the political struggles between liberal and conservative journalists throughout the Second Reign," as well as the beginning of the Republican period.

Regarding the style itself, the chronicles, once again Chalhoub (2020, p. 201) in his appreciation when informing that it "is a genre immersed in the indeterminacy of its time, in the uncertainty of lived history", as it "depends on immediate interlocution with other texts, discourses, gestures. It feeds on the facts of the moment and seeks to interfere in its course", adding a second characteristic that its focus, "far from exclusive", is based on political matters.

This observation was also highlighted by Beatriz Resende (1995, p. 35) that the genre is a modality of urban literature and that it was born in the city of Rio de Janeiro, where the chronicler had the possibility of observing the nuances of everyday life, directing his gaze to the countless possibilities offered in the environment of the then Federal Capital of Brazil.

Due to the trivial aspect mentioned, only "recently have these records begun to deserve more careful looks, which point to their importance both in the field of literary experimentation and testimony of the time lived" (Chalhoub et al., 2011, p. 14).

Machado de Assis did not escape the rule exposed above and, in the case of the serials and series in which he participated, only its use in the newspaper *Gazeta de Notícias* was observed, used by him as a way to expose his ideas and way of thinking, the result of a man of his time and, therefore, immersed in his conjectures. Let us know a little more about this important newspaper of the nineteenth century.

## **NEWS GAZETTE**

The newspaper was founded by José Ferreira de Araújo, Henrique Chaves, Manuel Carneiro and Elísio Mendes on August 2, 1875, at the Court, introducing a series of innovations for the press of the Imperial period, transformations related to "the significant expansion of activities related to the transport and services sector, a considerable growth of the population (...) installation of telegraphs (1874), the development of the Post Office and, mainly, of a road network (...)" (Barbosa, 2000).

According to Ramos (2008, p. 152), "the Gazeta inaugurated a cheap and popular way of making newspapers and, with it, the press would gradually gain the air of a large commercial enterprise, becoming truly accessible to an increasing number of readers". In addition to the affordable price, the newspaper inaugurated a "system of single sales throughout the city and differed from most of the publications existing in the period by spreading boys through the streets of the city" who shouted the copies.

Other innovations were the use of cliché, caricatures and the technique of interviews, as well as "a new format for the columns and articles of the Gazeta, making them more cheerful, lighter and more accessible to the reader (Ramos, 2008, p. 153), coming to be considered one of the main newspapers of the republican period.

The Gazeta had a significant circulation of 24 thousand copies, with six pages, "the last two (or a little more) being intended for advertisements, one for "On request", and the rest for a mixture of news, commercial information, parliamentary reports, news about theater, longer articles signed by more or less famous authors" (Gledson, 2006, p. 136).

According to Gledson (2006, p. 136), the newspaper "established a relatively intimate relationship between the writers and the public, a tone of conversation and daily exchange that perhaps did not exist, neither before nor after (...)".

With renowned names in their columns, including Machado de Assis, all identified by pseudonyms, they wrote about "politics, religion, artistic and literary productions, science, economics" (Boenavides, 2020, p. 217), where they emphasized the contradictions of modernization in the Brazilian style, one of them being the issue of slavery.

Boenavides (2020, p. 225) clarified that, although the newspaper was treated "even with a certain reverence by abolitionists", the fact was that it had in its paid pages "advertisements for rents and sale of slaves", a fact that was understood because, as the newspaper was not linked to any political party:

"The Gazeta was maintained mainly by subscriptions, sales and advertisements, having as a subsidiary source of income the offer of printing and typography services, as observed in the newspaper's advertisements. Anyone who wanted to write in the "on request" section of the newspaper, for example, had to pay an amount that varied according to the number of lines and even the space between them. Likewise, the ads occupied more than half of the newspaper's area. At least, a six-page edition of the Gazeta had two of them entirely dedicated to advertisements, and there were often three" (Boenavides, 2020, p. 227).

In 1956, after eighty-one years of existence, the Gazeta breathed its last on December 30 with the 299th edition of the year, being closed for only one month at the end of 1893 due to the clash with the then president Floriano Peixoto, but certainly contributed immensely to the changes of the period, of modernization of the press from its foundation in 1875, as well as the popularization of periodicals, as it brought in its baggage a whole poignant debate of nineteenth-century Brazilian society in its multiple aspects, that is, its contradictions and all of them based on the genre of the chronicle, as it addressed "in a singular way the changes that occurred in Brazilian daily life in the 1880s and participated, itself, in this modernization" (Boenavides, 2020, p. 219).

In conclusion, the turn of the century, accompanied by scientific-technological changes, the use of new sources of energy, completely altered "human life on a global scale in the last three decades of the nineteenth century" (Saliba, 2006, p. 242) and newspapers followed the changes, adapting to the new demands of the market, the reading public, its popularization and the professionalization of its professionals.

Although with so many novelties and growth, the Brazilian cultural environment remained without major novelties until 1922, with the Week of Modern Art and the press also suffered from these more professional aspects and the nostalgia for a very rich era that was the Empire, filled with a wealth of first-rate writers who developed in the period a very rich source of writings, which are part of the so-called classics of our literature.

"Printing machines, literate human beings and paper: this is the tripod on which the mass production of newspapers is based", as explained by Barros (2019, p. 186).

## CONCLUSION

After finishing the readings of the 478 chronicles of Machado de Assis, developed from 1883 to 1897, it became clear, although always cited, the aversion that the author maintained about Spiritism.

His peculiar way of writing, his fine irony, and his critical, let's say, "sour" sense, made the references alluded to about the Doctrine always have a comic and challenging air.

After the death of his wife, Carolina Augusta Novais, in 1904, our "witch" cooled down the criticism, possibly without being able to affirm, at that moment when we are confronted with our finitude and what awaits us from then on.

Even though he was a Catholic, Machado also criticized the Church, although without the same impetus perpetrated on Spiritism.

What was possible to analyze in the readings of the chronicles was that Machado was extremely pragmatic and realistic in his writings and, through such characteristics and his pessimistic view of the problems of the world, a doctrine that promulgates the aspect of progress and development of the spirit as desiderata of this evolution, were dissonant to his ears, hence his refusal and criticism of the Spiritist teachings.

To be able to make his reservations, our author had to read the books of the so-called Spiritist Pentateuch, in order of dissemination, "The Spirits' Book" (1857/1860), "The Mediums' Book" (1861), "The Gospel According to Spiritism" (1864), "Heaven and Hell" (1865) and the last, "Genesis" (1868), although possibly in a more superficial way.

In any case, reading and reliving historical moments of our history through the writings of Machado de Assis proved to be extremely gratifying in the one (01) year that I focused on in the elaboration of the research.

Spiritism is strongly rooted and consolidated as a religion in Brazil, although it has been "transformed" in this way, from the second half of the nineteenth century until today, emphasizing its religious bias or, according to Kardec's words, in the moral propositions of his philosophy, thus making an approximation with Catholicism and could even say, a syncretism also linked to Afro religions and Umbanda.

I arrive at the end of the research satisfied with the results obtained and grateful to penetrate the mind of our greatest name in national literature.

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