ENSAIO ESSAY

NAPOLEONS' MIRRORS

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Resumo: Este ensaio busca examinar o diálogo que o escritor brasileiro Machado de Assis (1839-1908) estabelece com o romancista francês Stendhal (Henri Beyle, 1783-1842), ao representar, em *Quincas Borba*, de 1891, um processo de identificação de um indivíduo com uma figura história (Rubião com Napoleão III) que acaba por levá-lo à loucura, bastante semelhante ao representado por Stendhal em *A cartuxa de Parma*, de 1839 (de Fabrizio com Napoleão I).

Palavras-chave: Machado de Assis; Stendhal; Escrita e Loucura; Literatura e História.

Abstract: This paper aims at examining the dialogue Brazilian writer Machado de Assis (1839-1908) establishes with French novelist Stendhal (Henri Beyle, 1783-1842), once he depicts, in his *Philosopher or dog?*, of 1891, an identification process of an individual with a historical figure (Rubião with Napoleon III) that ultimately drives him to madness, very similar to the one depicted by Stendhal in his *The charterhouse of Parma*, of 1839 (that of Fabrizio with Napoleon I).

Keywords: Machado de Assis; Stendhal; Writing and Madness; Literature and History.

Many critics have commented on how Machado de Assis (1839-1908), writing "in the periphery of capitalism" (Schwarz 2001), managed to become attuned to the best literature of his time, produced at the main centers of the Western Civilization. Not only did he become attuned, but he also inserted himself in that tradition. Furthermore, he was able to infuse the main trends of 19th century European aesthetics, namely Romanticism and Realism, with different shades – tropical,

marginal, challenging ones. Interesting enough, he seems to have achieved that through a strategy that goes entirely against the grain of provincialism: he inserted his writing in the canon of Western literature by inserting the canon of Western literature in his writing.[1]

This strategy can be witnessed both in his stylistic choices (which owe a lot, for instance, to Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* self-aware narrative and humor)[2] and intertextual references (that range from the *Iliad* to *One Thousand and One Nights*, from Cervantes to Renan). This paper aims at examining the dialogue Machado establishes with Stendhal (Henri Beyle, 1783-1842), once he depicts, in his *Philosopher or Dog?* (1891), an identification process of an individual with a historical figure that ultimately drives him to madness, very similar to the one depicted by Stendhal in his *The Charterhouse of Parma* (1839).[3]

Machado explicitly acknowledges his admiration for Stendhal three times in his *oeuvre*, all of which in his so-called "mature phase". The first one is in the prologue of his watershed work, *Epitaph of a Small Winner* (1881),[4] when he declares that he would not mind to have only fifty, or twenty, or ten, or even five readers, once Stendhal himself stated to have written a book to a hundred people only – in the prologue of *De l'Amour*, of 1822 (and it is also noticeable that he dedicated the *Chartreuse* "to the happy few"). The second one is in Chapter CXXXI of the same novel, when the first-person narrator uses the Stendhalian category (also borrowed from *De l'Amour*) of "passionate love" to describe his own feelings, while the third is in the short story "Maria Cora" (1906), when also a first-person narrator compares his own experience in the battlefield (helping the Army to control a rebellion in the south

[1] For an overview of the web of intertextual relations in the fiction of Machado de Assis, including those related to Stendhal, see Senna 2008.

[2] As Machado de Assis, Stendhal also explicitly shows his debt to Sterne. In the very beginning of the *Chartreuse*, he seems to allude to *Tristram Shandy*: "We must confess that, following the example of many serious authors, we have begun the story of our hero a year before his birth. This essential character is none other, in fact, than Fabrice Valserra, 'Marchesino' Del Dongo, as they say in Milan." (*Chartreuse*, I, 1)

[3] The English translation of Stendhal's title is quite faithful to the original: *The Charterhouse of Parma* for *La Chartreuse de Parme*. The same thing did not happen to Machado de Assis' work: *Quincas Borba* – the name of one of the characters ("Quincas" is a nickname for "Joaquim", and "Borba" is a relatively common last name in the Portuguese world) – circulated in English mainly under the title of *Philosopher or dog?*. For that reason, hereafter the two novels will be referred by an abbreviation of their original titles: *Chartreuse* and *Quincas*.

[4] The original title is *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas* – literally, *Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas* –, but its first translation into English consecrated the title *Epitaph of a Small Winner*. Again, it will be referred only as *Memórias Póstumas*.

of Brazil between 1893 and 1895) to Fabrice's experience in Waterloo: fulfilled with doubts and uncertainties.

These mentions to Stendhal's work act as a declaration of literary affiliation, as well as a demonstration of erudition. However, it is in another of his works, *Quincas Borba*, in which Stendhal's name (or of his characters) never appears, that the influence of the French author is more present. In many ways, *Quincas* can be seen as a *pendant* to *Memórias Póstumas*: the character Quincas Borba appears firstly in *Memórias Póstumas*, in which he is also a secondary character (in Chapter IV of *Quincas*, he is introduced this way: "This Quincas Borba, if you have read my *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas*, is that same shipwreck of existence…"). Likewise, the character Brás Cubas makes a quick apparition in *Quincas*. Quincas Borba's philosophy, the "Humanitism" – a bold satire of the many branches of Positivism so popular throughout the 19th century, is central to both novels, and the historical setting and the social *milieu* of the main characters are also the same.

This construction of the novel *en pendant* with another not only bestows upon the second the declaration of affiliation made in the prologue of the first, but also recreates – although with completely different characteristics – the relation between the *Chartreuse* and Stendhal's other masterpiece, *Le Rouge et le Noir* (1830). The tensions and the complementarities between Church and State can be seen in both novels; both heroes, Julien Sorel and Fabrizio del Dongo, are clergymen without vocation, have impulsive personalities, strong ambitions and shameless hypocrisy; the aristocratic ambiances in France and Italy are equally theatrical (*chez* the Marquis de la Mole, as well as in the Prince of Parma's palace); and Julien, as much as Fabrice, is a chronic admirer of Napoleon.

While the *Chartreuse* opens with the majestic scene of Napoleon's arrival in Milan, after overpassing the Alps (1796), the common background between *Memórias Póstumas and Quincas Borba* can be traced back to Napoleon's troops arrival in Lisbon. In 1807, after the Spanish Crown granted the French Army authorization to cross its territory while heading to Portugal, the Portuguese Crown decided to leave its seat and establish a new capital on the other side of the Atlantic, in its main colony. The arrival of the Queen, D. Maria, the Regent Prince, D. João VI

and the rest of the Portuguese court in Rio de Janeiro, in 1808,[5] was a tremendous boost to the city's urban development. So was the establishment of important institutions, such as the Bank of Brazil, the Royal Press, the National Guard, the Fine Arts Academy and many others. The invasion of Portugal by Napoleon was, ironically, what made room for the transformation of Rio from a colonial settlement to a vibrant city with its own capitalist elite; in other words, Napoleon's invasion was instrumental in the formation of Brazilian bourgeoisie.

Chapter XII of *Memórias Póstumas*, called "An episode of 1814", recalls an early remembrance of the protagonist's childhood: a party thrown by his parents to celebrate the first defeat of Napoleon. Brás Cubas says he was nine by then, which would establish 1805 as his birth year; and since it is stated that Quincas Borba was his contemporary (they were colleagues in school), that also makes of him an offspring of the bourgeois class that emerged upon the arrival of the Portuguese Royal Family in Rio. The action of *Quincas* takes place in the late 1860's, early 1870's, and Rubião, the main character, is a little younger than Quincas Borba and Brás Cubas, and was not raised in Rio de Janeiro's upper class, but rather in the town of Barbacena, in the landlocked state of Minas Gerais. Nevertheless, he is representative of that same generation, and at the center of his drama is his experience of being suddenly catapulted from a provincial to a cosmopolitan environment.

In the *Chartreuse*, the reader follows the adventures of the unstable *marchesino* Fabrizio del Dongo, first in his idealized quest for joining Napoleon's army, later in the juridical and political consequences of his ravishing passions. Throughout the novel, especially in the second book, almost as important as Fabrice are his aunt Gina Valserra, later known as Countess Pietranera, Duchess Sanseverina and finally Countess Mosca, and her lover and subsequent husband, Count Mosca, who use their influence and skills (they are both highly educated in courtesan etiquette and diplomacy) to give Fabrice a prestigious position and acquit him of the crimes he is accused of. *Quincas*, in turn, tells the story of Rubião, a schoolmaster in Barbacena, who inherits the whole fortune of his close friend Quincas Borba (who would have married his sister, had she not died prior to the planned wedding) and

[5] Most textbooks mention the transfer of 15.000 court members from Lisbon to Rio de Janeiro in 1808. However, Nireu Cavalcanti (2007), in a recent and accurate review of this topic, came to a much smaller number: only around 420 people.

goes to Rio de Janeiro to enjoy the pleasures of living in the capital. During the train ride from Barbacena to Rio he makes the acquaintance of a young lawyer, Cristiano Palha, and his wife, Sofia, who later will introduce him to the society, the business men, the restaurants and the cafés, the opera and the fancy stores, ultimately guiding him through this brave new world, not without taking advantage of his wealth and lack of experience.

It is remarkable, in the two novels, the presence of these "couples of puppeteers" (Gina and Mosca, Sofia and Palha), who counterbalance the naiveté of the main characters and whose actions denounce, somehow, the lethargy of Fabrice and Rubião: their inability to take care of themselves, their detachment from reality, their distorted visions of themselves, and ultimately their madness. In fact, both characters suffer from megalomania, a type of psychological deviance closely connected to the social (and thus historical) environment. As Machado's translator and critic Clotilde Wilson pointed:

> Megalomania was, indeed, the form of madness that most interested the pessimistic Machado de Assis, since, as Erasmus had insinuated and the psychologists recognize today, it offers an avenue of escape from the often humdrum and unhappy realities of life. (Wilson 1949)

Fabrice and Rubião see a different Napoleon in the mirror. Fabrice, maybe a bastard child of a French lieutenant (later an important colonel), as insinuated by the narrator, believed his place to be next to the Emperor, Napoleon I: he interprets the flight of an eagle (a Napoleonic symbol) when leaving the castle of Grianta as an omen of his own success.[6] Despite his moral, intellectual and even military limitations, he sincerely believes he is predestinated to a glorious future;[7] and despite the volubility of his feelings, he is convinced that he deserves the most romantic sentimental realization, no matter how many other people and interests are in his way.

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[6] Fabrice inherits the ability of reading omens in nature from his adoptive, affective and intellectual father, Father Blanés. It must be noted that the narrator uses the word "mad" to describe Father Blanés' attitude towards astrology, his main source of omens: "The fact is that Father Blanés, a man of positive *primitive* integrity and virtue and, moreover, a man of intelligence, spent all his nights at the top of his bell-tower; he was mad about astrology." (*Chartreuse*, I, 2)

[7] "Fabrice had not the slightest interest in conspiring; he loved Napoleon and believed that he himself, as a nobleman, was destined to be happier than other men; he thought the middle classes ridiculous. He had not opened a book since leaving school, where he had read only books authorized by the Jesuits." (*Chartreuse*, I, 5)

Rubião, on the other hand, develops a fantasy in which he believes to be Napoleon III, who was the actual ruler of France by that time; this fantasy, at first intermittent and harmless, gradually becomes more steady and dangerous, leading to his social decline and death.

Rubião's megalomania is labeled, within the novel, as "madness"; Fabrice's is not. This difference of treatment may rely on three sources. The first one is the distinct pathological constitution of both characters. Fabrice is a neurotic: he sees reality distorted, he has delusions about himself and wants to follow his desires at any cost (including the idea of becoming close to the Emperor), but he still knows he is Fabrice. Rubião, instead, is a psychotic; he starts seeing himself, his friends and the world around them as others – as Napoleon III, marshals and princesses, the Tuileries, Saint Cloud. The second source is the distinct literary constitution of both characters: Fabrice still has a lot (albeit caricatured) of a Romantic hero, to whom a certain degree of idealization is granted and who acts according to an almost chivalric code of behavior. That is not the case of Rubião, a Realist protagonist, obliged to face the crude reality at all times, in an era with no space to idealizations.

The third possible source of this difference of treatment is the increasing prominence of the scientific discourse (especially the medical one), replacing the religious and, in some cases, the secular one. Fabrice's megalomaniac behavior leads him to reclusion in prison (the Farnese Tower, metonymy of the State) and, at the end of the novel, in a monastery (the charterhouse, realm of the Church). Half a century later, Rubião's megalomania leads him to reclusion in a domestic space (the Prince Street little house, with friends and servants taking care of him), and finally in a mental health institution (the madhouse).[8]

The two novels show how the institutions and the discourses of power saw a dramatic change throughout the 19th century, especially when it comes to social regulation. In the *Chartreuse*, two models of state overlap: the Parma court of Stendhal's fiction is clearly modeled after the Renaissance Italian courts, Florence above all; and the imperial regime is represented by both the French and the Austrian

[8] The issue of "madness" in the work of the two authors has already been the object of a number of investigations. For the case of Stendhal, see Rigoli 2001, and Felman 1985 (for a broader perspective of 19th century France); and Felman 1971 (specifically for Stendhal). When it comes to Machado de Assis, see Peres and Massimi 2007; Hidalgo 2008; and Lima 2009.

dominions in northern Italy. In *Quincas* there is also such an overlap: the Brazilian Second Empire, under Pedro II, where the novel's action takes place, and the French Second Empire, under Napoleon III, in Rubião's imagination.[9]

In Brazil, as in France, writers were pioneer in describing phenomena much before the modern sciences had the tools to do it – and it applies to Medicine as much as to Sociology. Elizabeth Roudinesco underlines the contribution of Balzac to psychiatry:

> In a first moment, anxious to find a cure, they [the 19th century psychiatrists] searched in mad people's autobiographical accounts the clues they could not find in their bodies. Thus, they developed a fine art of textual study, making use of rhetoric devices and teaching oratory to the interns. From there comes an abundance of writings that, it must be said, have given no answer to the question made. […] Only the writers were brave enough to win this battle that science was fighting within itself. It belongs to Balzac, more than to Esquirol, the merit of having described, in *Louis Lambert*, the most beautiful case of madness ever imagined by the physicians. […] Balzac was, before Eugen Bleuler, the creator of the first practical and theoretical account of a case of schizophrenia. (Roudinesco 2001, my translation)

The same could be said about Stendhal or Machado de Assis. In order to prove that, Fabrice's and Rubião's itinerary towards delusion and illusion – their "Napoleonic *dévenir*", in Gilles Deleuze's sense – must be followed attentively.

The Napoleonic euphoria can already be seen in the first sentence of the *Chartreuse*. Many sectors of the Italian upper classes, suffocated by Austrian rule, saw the change of ruler as positive – some because of Napoleon's relation with the country (he was a native of Corsica and he titled himself, once he dominated part of the peninsula, as "King of Italy"). Others just because of his charisma, because under his rule they felt part of a greater empire. In the second chapter of the book, Fabrice takes the abrupt decision of joining the Emperor's troops:

> At six in the morning on the 8th of March, the Marquis was wearing his insignia and listening to his elder son dictate the draft of a third political dispatch, which he was solemnly transcribing in this elegant, careful handwriting on to paper watermarked with the image of his sovereign. At that very moment Fabrice was presenting himself at Countess Pietranera's door.
>
> "I'm leaving", he told her, "I'm going to join the Emperor, who is also King of Italy; he was such a friend to your husband! I'm going through Switzerland. Last night in Menaggio my friend Vasi, the barometer vendor, gave me his passport; now please let me have some money, as I've only forty lire, but if necessary I'll go on foot." (*Chartreuse*, I, 2)[10]

[9] For the landscape of French references in *Quincas Borba*, see Passos 2000; for a dense discussion about the overlaps and gaps between the European and the Brazilian cultures in the 19th century, see Schwarz 1992.

[10] All the quotes of the French writer are taken from Stendhal 1997.

It is never clear whether his decision is motivated by political, charismatic or affective reasons, or if by all of them; in any case, his attitude is abrupt, excessive and passionate. In the following chapter – already in the battlefield –, he demonstrates his whimsical character by trying to fight without belonging to a regiment, with no training, moved only by his childish impetuosity:

> "You can fight tomorrow, dearie," she said to him in the end; "today you'll stay with me. You can see, can't you, that you've got to learn about soldiering." "On the contrary, I want to fight right away," cried our hero somberly, which struck the vivandière as a good sign. The cannon-fire could be heard more frequently and seemed to be getting closer. (*Chartreuse*, I, 3)

Fabrice is seduced by the idea of battle, not by the battle itself – its motivations, its strategy, its inner dynamics. Throughout the novel, what attracts him is the appearance of things, not things as they are: the prestige of being a prince of the Church, not the faith; the courtship, not love; the glories of military life, not its reasons. His continuous search for appearance in lieu of essence leads him to a radical uncertainty about his own identity and belonging – about what is and what is not real – as shown in many excerpts:

> Ah! So now at last I'm under fire! he thought. I've been under fire! he kept telling himself with satisfaction. I'm a real soldier now! (*Chartreuse*, I, 3)

> "Monsieur, this is the first battle I've ever been in," he finally said to the sergeant; "but is this a real battle?"
> "Sort of. But you, who are you? " (*Chartreuse*, I, 3)

> "Please don't think me inquisitive", the canteen-keeper said to him, changing to the more polite form of address, "it's for your own good that I'm questioning you. But who are you, really?" (*Chartreuse*, I, 4)

> In one respect alone did he remain a child: was that he had seen a battle, and, secondly, was that battle Waterloo? (*Chartreuse*, I, 5)

One of the first symptoms of Rubião's detachment from reality is also his fondness of what is only apparent; the name of things instead of the content of things:

> "Yes, indeed", he [Freitas] said. "You live like a nobleman." Rubião smiled; "nobleman", even in comparison, is a word good to hear. (*Quincas*, XXIX).[11]

> And, to be sure, the brides that appeared at Rubião's side in those wedding fantasies of his were always ladies of title. The names were the sonorous and facile of our nobility, and here is

[11] All the quotes of the Brazilian writer are taken from Assis 1954.

> the explanation; a few weeks before, Rubião had picked up a *Laemmert Almanac*, and in turning its pages, he had come to the chapter on persons of title. If he knew of some, he was far from being familiar with them all. He bought an almanac, and read it over and over, letting his eyes run down the page from the marquis to the barons and back again, repeating the fine names and learning many by heart. Occasionally he would take up his pen and a sheet of paper, select a title, new or old, and write it again and again, as if it were his and he were signing something: Marquis of Barbacena, Marquis of Barbacena, Marquis of Barbacena… (*Quincas*, CXXXII)

His predilection for the signifier instead of the signified[12] is visible in the relation he starts to develop with literature. Like a new Don Quijote (and this similarity has been largely explored by the critics), he starts merging fiction and reality, within a well-defined literary repertory:

> Recently he had been reading a great deal; he read novels, but only the historical ones of Dumas père, or the contemporary ones by Feuillet, the latter with difficulty, as he did not know very well the language in which they were written. Of the former, there were many translations. Occasionally he would risk another novel, if he found that it concerned an aristocratic and royal society, which was what constituted the other's chief appeal for him. Those scenes of the French court invented by the marvelous Dumas, his noble swordsmen and adventurers, Feuillet's countesses and dukes, who moved about in luxurious hothouses with considered and courteous speech, exalted and elegant, passed the time quickly for him. Almost always when he read, his book would fall to the floor finally, and he would remain staring thoughtfully into space. Perhaps some long deceased marquis was telling him tales of other days. (*Quincas*, LXXX)

Before becoming Emperor of the French (in his mind), he flirts with the pomp and circumstance that surround the Emperor of Brazil. Rubião stalking D. Pedro II recalls, to a certain extent, Fabrice stalking Napoleon:

> How he liked to go on gala days and wait for the Emperor at the gate of the city palace to see the arrival of the imperial cortege, especially the coach of His Majesty, with its fine old paintings, its huge proportions and strong springs, and its four or five pairs of horses, driven by a grave and decorous coachman. (*Quincas*, LXXXI)

> The Emperor was in Paris. There Fabrice's misfortunes began; he had set off with the firm intention of speaking to the Emperor and it had never once occurred to him that this might be a difficult thing to do. In Milan he used to see Prince Eugène ten times a day and could have spoken to him. In Paris he went every morning to the Tuileries Palace courtyard to watch Napoleon inspecting the troops, but never could he get close to the Emperor. Our hero imagined that all the French felt as deeply stirred as he did by the great danger threatening their country. (*Chartreuse*, I, 2).

[12] Here, the concepts of "signifier" and "signified" are freely borrowed from Ferdinand de Saussure's *Cours de Linguistique Générale*. In raw terms, the "signifier" is the form of a certain linguistic sign, while the "signified" is the concept of that same sign.

As Roland Barthes stated (1992), in the Realist code the *décor* is as full of meaning as any other element in the narrative. The Machadian narrator, as well as the Stendhalian, is profuse in disseminating indexes of his character's obsessing object. It is not coincidentally that images of Napoleon can be seen in Rubião's mansion and in the Sanseverina palace:

> The other guests followed the first, selected some cigars, and those who were not yet familiar with the study admired the well-made and well-arranged furniture. The secretary won general admiration; it was of ebony, with beautiful marquetry, substantial and with severe lines. But there was something new waiting for them; two marble busts of top of it, the two Napoleons, the first and the third. "When did this come?" "Today at noon", answered the servant. (*Quincas*, CXXIV)

> The Prince has given his consent; on the whole, Sanseverina is quite acceptable; he possesses the finest *palazzo* in Parma and unlimited wealth; he is sixty-eight years old and desperate to own the Grand Cordon; but his life is ruined by a dreadful blunder, he once bought a bust of Napoleon by Canova for 10,000 lire. (*Chartreuse*, I, 6)

If Fabrice takes his obsession with Napoleon I up to the point of risking his physical integrity in Waterloo, Rubião takes his fixation on Napoleon III up to the point of compromising his physical integrity – of transforming his visual presentation:

> It was at that time that Rubião astonished all his friends. On the Tuesday following the Sunday of the ride (it was then January 1870), he asked a barber and hairdresser of Ouvidor Street to send some one to his house to shave him next day at nine o'clock in the morning. A Frenchman, called Lucien, went there, and, according to the orders given to the servant, he was sent to Rubião's study. […] The barber glanced about the study, where the most prominent thing was the secretary with the bust of Napoleon and Louis Napoleon on top. Hanging on the wall over the latter were an engraving or lithograph of the Battle of Solferino and a portrait of Empress Eugenia. (*Quincas*, CXLV)

> He had not understood a word; though he knew some French, he could only read it – as we know – and he did not understand the spoken language. But, curiously enough, his answer was not hypocritical, he heard the words as if they were a greeting or an acclamation, and, what is still more curious, he believed he was speaking French.
>
> "Precisely", he repeated. "I wish to restore my face to its former appearance; there it is."
>
> And, as he pointed to the bust of Napoleon the III, the barber answered in Portuguese:
>
> "Ah! The Emperor! A fine bust, indeed. […]" (*Quincas*, CXLVI)

> After he was alone, Rubião threw himself into an armchair and watched a parade that was passing in his mind. He was in Biarritz or Compiègne, we don't know exactly, he heard the ministers and ambassadors, he danced, he dined – and he did other things that had been reported in newspaper dispatches that he had read and that had stayed in his mind. Not even Quincas Borba whining succeeded in arousing him. He was far away and high above. Compiègne was on the road to the moon, and he was on his way to the moon. (*Quincas*, CXLVII)

While Fabrice's behavior is steady throughout the *Chartreuse* (and therein lies his major problem: his arrogance and irresponsibility are traits of a childish behavior), Rubião's conduct changes dramatically throughout *Quincas*. At first a well-mannered, reasonable person, he develops later in the novel a dual personality, alternating moments of lucidity and madness; and finally gives in completely to the fictitious self he created:

> Rubião was still two. His own person and the Emperor of the French did not fuse within him. They took turns, and even forgot each other's existence. When Rubião was just himself, he was the same as ever. When he rose to the position of Emperor of the French, he was just Emperor. Each offset the other, each was a complete individual. (*Quincas*, CXLVIII)

> Several months passed, the Franco-Prussian war broke out, and Rubião's crises became more acute, and far less apart. When the European mail arrived early, he would leave Botafogo before lunch, and hurry to await the papers; he would buy the *Correspondência de Portugal* and go to the Carceler to read it. Whatever the news, he always interpreted them as victory. He would count up the dead and wound, and invariably found a large balance in his favor. For him Napoleon's fall was King Wilhem's capture, and the revolution of the fourth of September a banquet for the Bonapartists. His dinner guests at home did not try to dissuade him; nor, abashed by the other's presence, did they confirm what he had to say. They merely smiled and changed the subject. Meanwhile, all had acquired military titles, Marshal Torres, Marshal Pio, Marshal Ribeiro, and they answered to their title. (*Quincas*, CLVI)

When it comes to spaces the characters are eventually confined to, both Rubião and Fabrice idealize them, and seem to be unable to discern the actual circumstances that surround them. Confined to a humble house (by a legally established curator) and to a maximum-security prison (by an appointed general, governor of the prison), both characters see their environment through the lenses of their fantasies:

> It was all done quietly. Palha rented a little house on Príncipe Street, near the sea, where he put our Rubião. With a few pieces of furniture and his devoted dog. Rubião accepted the change willingly, and, when his madness was upon him, enthusiastically. He was now in his palace in Saint-Cloud. (*Quincas*, CLXV)

> When he was alone and had recovered somewhat from all the noise: Can this possibly be a prison? Fabrice asked himself, gazing at the immense horizon stretched from Treviso to Mount Viso, the broad expanse of the Alps, the snow-covered mountain peaks, the stars etc.; and a first night in prison at that! I can understand that Clelia Conti should like living in this aerial seclusion; here you feel you're a thousand leagues above the pettiness and spite which fill our days down there. (*Chartreuse*, II, 17)

In the *Chartreuse*, Fabrice's expression of uncertainty about having been in the Battle of Waterloo is less related to his factual presence in the battle – yes, he was in Waterloo, and yes he was in the middle of a battle –, and more to his engagement and

belonging to the meanings of the historical event "Battle of Waterloo". In other words, he realizes that his individual experience lies in the gap between the historical signifier and the historical signified – in this case, one given by his fantasy. Alternatively, in *Quincas*, Rubião builds a bridge over that gap: in order to accommodate the historical signified of his fantasy (the identification with Napoleon III) within the historical signifier of the reality that surrounds him (the city of Rio de Janeiro), he deforms the latter, taking advantage of the signifiers' plasticity.

For instance, Rubião decodes the "Campo" ("Field", from "Acclamation Field", one of the main squares in 19th century Rio de Janeiro) mentioned by Major Siqueira as another "Campo" – maybe the *Champ de Mars* in Paris, or a unspecified military yard; and Siqueira's military rank provides him with an opportunity to wield his own military power – as Emperor – by promoting Siqueira:

> "My coach is coming for me," replied Rubião serenely.
> "It's not coming here [said the Major]; it is gone to wait for you in the Campo. Can't you see the coach from here, Tonica?"
> Dona Tonica made a vague, reluctant gesture. She did not want to lie, but she was afraid, and she bid Rubião to go. It was not possible to see the Campo da Aclamação from the house. Her father already had Rubião by the arm, and was walking him to the door.
> "Come again tomorrow, or some time later, when you like."
> "But why should I not wait here until the coach comes?" asked Rubião. "The Empress mustn't get caught in the rain."
> "The Empress has already left".
> "She made a mistake. Eugenia made a big mistake. General – why should you always remain a Major?"
> […]
> "This gentleman is my future son-in-law", the Major said to Rubião. "Didn't you see a coach and cavalry squadron in the Campo?" he asked Rodrigues, with a wink.
> "I think so, sir."
> […]
> "In the Campo, you say?"
> "In the Campo."
> "Good-bye."
> (*Quincas*, CLXXXI)

> Rubião gave no further thought to the coach, nor the cavalry. He suddenly found himself some blocks away and after walking for a while he turned up São José Street. He was coming from the Imperial Palace, gesticulating and talking to someone whom he supposed he had by the arm. It was the Empress. Eugenia or Sophia? Both fused into a single entity – or, rather, the second with the name of the first. (*Quincas*, CLXXXII)

★★★★★

Fifty years after Stendhal's novel and across the Atlantic, Machado de Assis seems to give another turn in the screw in the relation between individual experience and historical event proposed by the French novelist. Rubião's overt psychosis is *in nuce* in Fabrice's latent neurosis; their character traits and social interactions are very similar, as well as their dissatisfaction with their insertion in History. They found slightly different ways of dealing with the task of waking up in the morning and seeing a Napoleon in the mirror.

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