

Learning to unlearn: Machado de Assis and the pedagogy of choice

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Abstract

This study results from research on the tragic imaginary of the works of Machado de Assis and its relation with the dimensions of choice in education, considered from a philosophical perspective. The question asked relates to the educational deployment of Machado's thought, which presupposes unlearning in order to reach the choice of approval of existence – a route taken by his characters since the stage of his work consensually regarded as mature, inaugurated by the publication of *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas* (*Posthumous Memoirs of Bras Cubas*). My aim is to understand the tragic imaginary expressed by the notions of nothing, chance and convention, as well as by the conditions for choosing to approve. The methodological path appropriated phenomenology and hermeneutics in the analysis of Machado's work and, as a result, pointed to an education whose philosophical foundations are the possible choice between the unconditional approval of existence and conditioned approval. In the case of the Machadian option, approval is manifested by the relativization of the references of meaning, by the questioning of belief, by adhesion to circumstances, by recognition of the spectacle, the strength of opinions and social conventions, and by affirming the ephemeral character of life, of human contradictions and of the conjunction of adverse reality and will to live.

Keywords

Tragic philosophy – Pedagogy of choice – Machado de Assis.

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Aprendizagem de desaprender: Machado de Assis e a pedagogia da escolha

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Resumo

O presente estudo resulta de uma pesquisa sobre o imaginário trágico da obra de Machado de Assis e sua relação com as dimensões da escolha no âmbito da educação, considerada em perspectiva filosófica. A questão que se coloca relaciona-se ao desdobramento educacional do pensamento machadiano, que pressupõe uma passagem pela aprendizagem para se chegar à escolha da aprovação da existência – itinerário percorrido por seus personagens a partir da fase de sua obra consensualmente dita madura, inaugurada pela publicação de Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas. O objetivo é compreender o imaginário trágico, expresso pelas noções de nada, acaso e convenção, bem como as condições para a escolha da aprovação. O trajeto metodológico apropriou-se da fenomenologia e da hermenêutica na análise da obra machadiana e, como resultado, apontou para uma educação cujas bases filosóficas se assentam na escolha possível entre a aprovação incondicional da existência e a aprovação condicionada. No caso da opção machadiana, a aprovação se manifesta pela relativização das referências de sentido, pelo questionamento da crença, pela adesão às circunstâncias, pelo reconhecimento do espetáculo, da força das opiniões e das convenções sociais, e pela afirmação do caráter efêmero da vida, das contradições humanas e da conjunção entre realidade adversa e vontade de viver.

Palavras-chave

Filosofia trágica – Pedagogia da escolha – Machado de Assis.

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This article is the result of research funded by FAPESP in the period 2010-2012, and condenses the data that relate the tragic imaginary of the literature of Machado de Assis (1994), in a philosophical bias (ALMEIDA, 2010), to the educational implications arising from the analysis of his work.

The aim is to investigate the tragic imaginary that characterized Machado's work and its implications for education, specifically its dimension of unlearning and choice. The tragic is manifested through recurrent aspects of his work: the transitory and purposeless nature of life; all sorts of relativization, the taste for glitz and spectacle; the game of conventions; interested and malicious uses of morality; the eternal return of the same; the uniqueness of the moment lived; the meaninglessness of existence; human contradictions; the voluptuousness of nowhere; and, finally, the mysterious conjunction between an unpleasant life and the joy of living. That is why what characterizes the tragic in Machado is not the realization of *the worst* of existence, but the *approval* of existence *despite* the worst.

The theoretical framework prioritizes the main interpreters of his work, as Alfredo Bosi (2007, 2010), Antonio Candido (1995), Raymundo Faoro (2001), Afrânio Coutinho (1959), João Adolfo Hansen (2006, 2008) and Alcides Villaça (1998), besides philosophical contributions, particularly of Friedrich Nietzsche (1983, 1992, 1995), Clément Rosset (1985, 1989a, 1989b, 1989c, 1997, 2000, 2005) and Wittgenstein (1968), among others. The perspective of the imaginary was based on the contributions of Gilbert Durand (1997). From the methodological point of view, I prioritized the short stories of the phase consensually classified as mature and *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas* (*Posthumous Memoirs of Bras Cubas*), responsible for inaugurating it. Regarding the analysis procedures, I adopted a phenomenological attitude, especially in its postulate of suspension of judgments, and resources of hermeneutics, in the relationship

between metaphors, parables, analogies and philosophical thought.

The educational approach starts from the observation that Machado's literature provides an unlearning of the references of meaning. If education is conditioned upon the belief in a truth or many truths, the education of unlearning or pedagogy of choice proposes disposing of that feeling of truth, belief, be it ideological, scientific or moral, so that, instead of hope, fear, or even disillusion, one can be situated in the world, understand it, as well as experience the intensity of existence through the choice of approval.

The thrust of tragic philosophy

From a conceptual standpoint, it is possible to define the tragic through the thrust of Machado's thought: the realization of an existence deprived of meaning, principle or purpose; of a nature without God, will, completely indifferent to what exists; a society governed by conventions (difference) which, however much they change, are unable to modify the chance of existence (repetition); finally, the realization that men are contradictory and their lives do not have metaphysical goals or goals determined by factors external to existence itself, even if imaginary conventions of meaning persist. But Machado does not disapprove of what he finds, thus approaching his contemporary Nietzsche, who develops a philosophy which not only finds the tragic as the expression of chance constitutive of existence, but also celebrates the joy of existence, a tragic joy, which is not justified rationally, but which is sustained by the unconditional approval of what is given to live, as the readings of Roberto Machado (2001) and Clément Rosset (2000) show.

The tragic thought should not be confused with a pessimistic view, since it approves of the existence, even in its most unpleasant reality: "formula of maximum affirmation of fullness, abundance, of saying

yes without reservations, even to suffering, to one's own guilt, to all that is troublesome and strange in existence" (NIETZSCHE, 1995, p. 118). The same announcement is made by Clément Rosset (1989a, p. 8), who proposes to think the "link between the joy of existence and the tragic character of existence".

This is precisely what occurs in *Posthumous Memoirs of Bras Cubas*, in which the narrator, after death, unravels the void of meaning in all the circumstances experienced, deconstructing social, moral, political and love conventions. This is what he calls the *ink of melancholy* in the initial warning directed to the reader. In fact, the narrator denaturalizes all pretensions of human grandeur: neither political office, nor love life, philosophical or literary pretensions; nothing is great or has value, except the power of what was experienced, the individual will to exist (and not the metaphysical will, as in Schopenhauer). This melancholic finding, however, comes together with the *pen of mockery*, that is, a destabilizing humor (MAYA, 2007), which never regrets what it finds, nurtures hope for change, or even morally judges. There is no whining, hope or judgment in Machado's work, just humor in finding the ephemerality of human existence: "we kill time, time buries us" (ASSIS, 1990, p. 120). Thus, the tragic can be defined as

[...] what makes all discourse silence, what eludes all attempts to interpret it: particularly rational interpretation (order of causes and purposes), religious or moral interpretation (order of explanations of every nature). Thus the tragic is silence. (ROSSET, 1989a, p. 65)

That is why such a view should not be confused with a pessimistic disposition because

[...] This vision refuses all the qualities that were, over time, more or less linked to the concept of tragic: sadness, cruelty, dark, ineluctability, irrationality. (ROSSET, 1989a, p. 66)

In this sense, the tragic thought can be expressed by the ideas of nothing, chance and convention.

Nothing can guarantee the permanence of something that, as Schopenhauer (2004) expressed, awakens in the birth and dies with death. Therefore, the consciousness that perceives the nothingness that it was before birth, although the world was, and the nothingness that awaits it, even if the world remains, has the difficult choice of approving an existence without beginning or purpose other than those of circumstantial nature (tragic choice) or, unable to bear this view, of believing something that justifies the existence (non tragic choice).

The references to think the non-tragic – ideology, metaphysics, religion etc – start by believing in something that, by definition, does not exist, is nothing:

[...] Every belief being defined, not by content, but by a mode of adherence, it is possible to anticipate that all the destruction of belief will culminate in the replacement by a new belief that will reset, on a new pseudo content, the same way of believing. (ROSSET, 1989a, p. 45)

This impossibility of specifying the object of belief reveals the insignificance of the object itself, or rather the fact that this content means nothing (all meaning is given imaginarily). This datum leads to a second aspect of the tragic thought: the random condition of existence.

Rarely does chance manifest itself in an explicit form; in philosophers such as Montaigne, Pascal or Nietzsche, where chance plays a role both fundamental and silent, hardly ever does it appear clearly. However, it may intervene explicitly. This is the case, for example, in Lucretius, who attributes the paternity of any organization to chance, order being but a particular case of disorder. Imperialism inherent in the

concept of chance: producing everything, chance also produces its opposite, which is order (hence the existence, among others, of a certain world, this one known to man, and which characterizes the relative stability of certain combinations). (ROSSET, 1989a, p. 96)

Morin (1999, p. 196-203) fixed well this relationship between order and disorder, stating that the first look from the point of view of human history was that of disorder. Such disorder becomes much richer contemporaneously, since, in addition to its objective pole (unrests, dispersions, collisions and various instabilities), it includes a subjective pole, which is relative indeterminacy, i.e., uncertainty. Therefore, we would have to learn to think about order and disorder, i.e., work with chance. Regarding chance, the novelty that Morin (1970) interposes is its presence or its relatively recent recognition by science, which has come to understand physicochemical attractions as organizations to compensate for chance, since the world is doomed to chance, to live on chance, to endure chance.

It is in this sense that we can understand Darwinian evolutionism, “it is chance that creates order” (LESTIENNE, 2008, p. 91), since there is a cut which, even if it does not generate independence, at least it indicates that there are two distinct processes in evolution. The first one is variation, and the second is selection. If, for the second one, circumstances are determinant for the survival of the species (which, strictly speaking, does not contravene chance), in relation to variation, according to Darwin (cited LESTIENNE, 2008, p. 88), “a mutation is random in that the chance of it occurring is not affected by the fact that it can be useful to the survival of the species.” In other words, variations proliferate at random, although some remain and others do not, through selection.

This amounts to saying that there is no nature as a generating principle of existence, endowed with intention, purpose, law, reason

or purpose, but that order is a variation of disorder, a convention. In other words, nature and artifice are not opposites, but other names for convention (ALMEIDA, 2012, 2013). Among the possible combinations to generate this or that existential condition, some occur and remain, others last very little, many others do not even happen.

If existence is the realm of convention, i.e., of encounters by chance (which is convergent with Epicurus' notion of *clinamen*), so are social conventions, though these express a greater degree of complexity.

The thought of chance is, thus, led to eliminate the idea of nature and replace such idea with the notion of *convention*. What exists is of an order that is not natural, but conventional – in every sense of the word. Convention means, at an elementary level, the simple fact of the encounters (congregations that result in mineral, plant or other “natures”; encounters that make ‘sensations’ possible). At a more complex level of human order, and more specifically social order, the convention takes its derived meaning of institutional or customary order (contribution of the human chance to the chance of the rest ‘that exists’). (ROSSET, 1989a, p. 101)

The meaning of these conventions, the pieces, the relationships, the meanings that are possible, rejected or disseminated will always be of imaginary order. It is, in fact, the imaginary – set of images, but also dynamism generator of meaning (DURAND, 1997) – that will organize the understanding of that, which is the order of the conventional.

The tragic thought, therefore, is expressed with the notions of nothing, chance and convention. The non-tragic thought, unable to refute the nothing, chance and convention, will constitute itself by the attempt to establish and stabilize some principle, which will serve as a premise or assumption to reject the unpleasant part of reality.

Learning to unlearn

The idea of learning presupposes not only the acquisition of certain knowledge, but also the belief in such knowledge, its possibility of truth. This is not about religious faith, which presupposes an absence of doubt about what is presented as divine revelation, but the belief that accompanies even the scientific knowledge in which doubt is the engine of the method.

In this sense, education requires the *feeling* of belief in the truth of knowledge, of assimilation of content about phenomena and objects that correspond to its reality. In the case of the Enlightenment heritage, education seeks the rational achievement of autonomy and, through the school, it tries to inculcate the belief in these values, especially by the critical use of reason.

Education works with the belief in knowledge, thus, in removing doubts or taking them to a safe place, as science does, which allows questioning the results and the methods used, but not the scientificity of its principles and knowledge. As David Hume (1973) explains, at the beginning of the second part of *Research on Human Understanding*, the belief is close to imagination, but other than this, the belief is accompanied by feeling, which makes it conceive an object in a more lively, stronger and more stable way. In the case of school education, didactic (pre) disposition itself, along with other rituals concerning the teaching practice, takes charge of that feeling which accompanies knowledge seeking to *fix* it, to make it *stable*. It is not the search for provisional knowledge, or the problematization of certain statements, but a learning process which corresponds to a larger program of *naturalization, interpretation and recognition* of the reference (the world) to which such knowledge alludes, as if it were the expression of truth.

Now, the pedagogy of choice can only support education that challenges the belief. Disposing of that feeling of truth (belief) is perhaps the greatest challenge posed to

education by the pedagogy of choice, because education only allows the choice conditioned to variants pre-established by knowledge which refers to a particular phenomenon or object (the world). Hence, also the long process of schooling, in which, despite the importance of the knowledge taught, we work arduously to develop certain knowledge / beliefs.

This is not about absolute skepticism, which would erase all the meanings or all the possibilities of knowing, but about recognizing the symbolic nature of knowledge, which Cassirer (2001) called the philosophy of symbolic forms, which recognizes that philosophy, science, religion and art are symbolic elaborations of the world, operate as a mediation, not as the enunciation of a truth.

Therefore, the pedagogy of choice, recognizing these symbolic forms, operates in the suspension of this *feeling* of belief which accompanies knowledge. In other words, it operates by unlearning, i.e., it problematizes the references and assumptions used in building the alleged truth. It leads the doubt to the root of that feeling of belief, so that the doubt gives rise to choice.

Such pedagogy considers choice the central theme of the foundations of education, because assigning to the human beings the possibility to choose presupposes seeing education as a dynamic and unfinished process of self-construction and self-education, thus, as a process far from the Enlightenment conceptions of autonomy and emancipation, because it no longer reduces men to the exercise of their rationality, but incorporates the portion of irrationality that characterizes them as *sapiens demens*.¹

1- In the words of Morin (1973, p. 110-111), *homo sapiens demens* is "a being of an intense and unstable affection, who smiles, laughs, cries, an anxious and distressed being, a mocker, a drunk, an ecstatic, violent, furious, loving being, a being invaded by the imaginary, a being who knows death, but who cannot believe it, a being that segregates the myth and magic, a being possessed by the spirits and gods, a being that feeds on illusions and chimeras, a subjective being whose relations to the objective world are always uncertain, a being subjected to error and vagrancy, a lubricious being who produces disorder. And, as we call madness the conjunction of illusion, excess, instability, the uncertainty between the real

Education is, therefore, an exercise of choice, trajectory which is inscribed in life and writes it, through actions, emotions, images, symbols, works, meanings, etc. From this anthropological perspective, a man is a trajectory, projects his world, narrates himself. And in this narrative, he chooses the symbolic meaning of his existence, he inscribes himself in the world through the *anthropological path*, the choices he makes between his subjectivity and the demands of the objective world. (FERREIRA SANTOS; ALMEIDA, 2012, p. 153-154)

The act of choosing presumes a cut, a separation, is the recognition that totality, for us, is impossible and unattainable, and that it can only be imaginarily constructed, as we are always tied to a point of view, even if the look is mobile. Thus, knowledge is knowledge about something, constructed in relation to an object, not all at once as a revelation, but by fragments, instants which succeed one another and parts which are related. Once an object is known, with the help of context, we can recognize it in the relationship of the parts to the whole, but also unlearn it, both in the difference of its parts, and in the whole. Knowledge is formed by successions of *looks*, by approaching and distancing, continuities and ruptures, learning and unlearning. It is the continuation of recognitions and the intensity of emotions that will enable adhering to the belief.

The first move towards knowledge is always accompanied by disbelief. We do not believe or do not want to believe right away. The object first seen causes suspicion. However, we do not come to believe because it repeats itself, but because it conquers opinions. Therefore, the belief is not the effect of a decision of the subject, but is shared by opinions.

I believe this is the *leitmotif* of the short story *The Bonzo's Secret*, by Machado de Assis.

and the imaginary, the confusion between subjective and objective, of error, disorder, we are compelled to see *Homo sapiens* as *Homo demens*".

The story takes place in 1552, in the kingdom of Bungo, China, and begins with the distrust that the narrator and Diogo Meireles nurture of certain men who explained, according to their science, the origin of locusts or the principle of future life. The people clustered seem to believe what the alleged wise announces, less for the veracity of his explanation and more for the sharing of opinions of those surrounding the social figure whose authority to proclaim the truth is recognized. The narrator and Diogo Meireles, due to the distance between cultures, do not recognize such convention, doubt the authority of the speaker. Since the beginning, the short story presents the conditions of context to recognize the lie.

Thus, in every step of the plot, we are faced with blatant lies, but which are masquerading as truths there. The statement of the phenomenon is expressed by the narrator as follows:

I considered the case, and I understood that if a thing can exist in the opinion without existing in reality, and exist in reality, without existing in the opinion, the conclusion is that of the two parallel existences, the only one required is that of the opinion, not that of reality, which is just convenient. (ASSIS, 2008, p. 71)

The actual existence need not be understood, does not need us, our knowledge, our science, our belief. It exists. But the existence imagined – which exists in the opinion, but not in reality, and that therefore *can only exist in the opinion – is necessary* for us because it defines us, defines our conventions and, above all, our beliefs.

In other words, what Machado says is that the object of knowledge matters little (whether it exists in reality or only in opinion); what does matter is the belief that accompanies it. Knowledge is, therefore, built by belief. Reality, though hovering as a benchmark against which we test our knowledge (science

principle), is only convenience. The real is only considered if it is convenient, in a movement after what is believed.

And let us not lose sight of the etymological meaning of *believe*, which derives from the Greek *doxa* and can be freely translated as *opinion*. This is, thus, the commonplace activity of having an opinion, of believing some knowledge, some truth. Broadly speaking, the common use of the verb know already assumes that one believes in what is known. What exists in the opinion, like Deolindo's lie (*An Admiral's Evening*), the medallion career taught to Janjão (*Theory of the Medallion*) or the symbolic dimension of the lieutenant uniform (*The Mirror*), has more value than the real, because if the real is sometimes inconvenient, we can choose an existence more enjoyable to our opinion.

In *The Bonzo's secret*, the opinion never appears alone, but is accompanied by some profit, which may be financial or paid with *consideration* and *praise*. Thus, to test the discovery, Titané will profit from selling sandals (a type of shoe) after publishing a lie in the newspaper about their extraordinary qualities; the narrator will become famous for his music and his skill as a charabela player (a kind of clarinet); and Diogo Meireles, the most ingenious of all, will invent the metaphysical nose. The people who had no noses, due to an illness that forced them to have their noses cut off, received a metaphysical nose from Diogo Meireles and, thereafter, started believing that they had recovered their noses, and they were accompanied by the belief of the others, although they continued to see faces without noses. Therefore, those who can win over the shared opinion by persuasion get the validation of what they announce and begin to profit from their knowledge. This is the mechanism of the show, the use of appearances, the power of opinion. It can be deduced from the work of Machado that power is based not only on strength but also on the belief, starting with the belief in strength.

Science, metaphysical philosophy and religion – the three great systems of knowledge production – for which different ways of believing are developed, are continually discredited in and by Machado de Assis's work, evidencing his *program of unlearning*.

The work of Machado teaches us to unlearn through the suspension of belief. In *The Psychiatrist*, for example, scientific truth is relativized until it loses any reference, so that reason becomes mad and madness becomes good sense. So, science's way of believing, based on the use of reason and experimentation, is discredited. That we must distrust the scientific truth is what his work teaches us. In *The Bonzo's Secret*, metaphysics becomes a joke. In *The Devil's Church*, the separation of virtues and vices, under the jurisdiction of morality, is put to the test, making collapse, also by using a relativistic formula, both morality and religion, and especially the grounds that religion might still have a moralizing role, in the sense of *improving*, if not *saving*, the human species.

Paraphrasing Alfredo Bosi (2007), we can, therefore, consider that Machado de Assis is a terrorist educator, who teaches through unlearning, who uses reason and humor, logic and emotion, to distance the reader from the object of the narrative, to the point that such object becomes unusual, worthless, meaningless, so completely unlearned that we have to learn to see it differently, that is, devoid of belief, of the *feeling of belief* which had contaminated it.

To understand this movement, we can use the argument of Rosset (1989c, p. 49-51), who sees in unlearning the loss of the idea of nature:

Considering the world independent of the idea of nature means to generalize an experiment of unlearning which most poets recommend to all who wish to rediscover a "naive" contact, simultaneously new and original, with the existence [...]. This poetic effect of unlearning has often been interpreted philosophically as a mystical access to the essence of being, a kind of

immediate contact with the intimacy of the real confusingly represented as the truth of the being. [...] One can propose a completely different philosophical interpretation of unlearning, which makes the artifice and chance, and not nature and essence, the object of the poetic look. According to this second interpretation, the experience of unlearning is limited to unlearning, without obtaining or looking for a pure vision of the object usually perceived through the network of utilitarian and intellectual relationships. [...] what is unlearned in poetic emotion is mainly the idea of nature, that is, the idea that any existent should and may result from some principle.

Therefore, the study of the Machadian work points to an aesthetic reception which experiences the possibility of denaturalization of the world by questioning the references, which proves the tragic character of his philosophy and highlights an education by means of unlearning, of this secondary act of returning to what has been learned to problematize its meanings and the assumptions on which they are based.

For clarity, it is worth establishing a parallel with the postulates of Alberto Caeiro – an heteronym of the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa – who constructed his philosophy of life based on the denial of all metaphysical philosophy (just like Machado), lived in a denaturalized nature (just like Machado) and advocated *learning to unlearn* (just like Machado).

Generally speaking, Alberto Caeiro states that men have unlearned to see the world, replacing the plurality and uniqueness which make it up with ideas. The idea of set is an example. The poet discovers that nature does not exist, at least not as *a real and true set*, but only as *parts without a whole*. This knowledge of the parts depends on the look, the view, the standpoint, depends on whether the object shows itself to our eyes. The ideas are not seen, needing to be built, often without direct relation with existence.

After *denaturalizing* nature, showing that it has no interior, has no will, the poet teaches that one needs a *deep study, learning to unlearn*, to accept that what we see of things are things, that is, the world is spectacle, appearance, that there is no mystery or hidden meaning and that one thing does not mean another (ALMEIDA, 2011).

In the field of philosophy, Caeiro characterizes the real by the real itself, that is, in a tautological way. The wind passing says that it is wind and that it passes and that it has passed before and that it will pass later. Machado de Assis uses the same resource in a short story which illustrates his vision of the world and knowledge: *A Canary's Ideas*.

Macedo, *a man who had a fancy for ornithology*, casually discovered a canary that spoke. In the junk shop where he was, he asks the canary for first time what the world is. And although the canary emitted the sound we are accustomed to, Macedo was able to *understand* what the canary was saying:

The world, retorted the canary with a patronizing air, the world is a junk shop, with a small rectangular bamboo cage, hanging from a nail, the canary is lord of the cage that it lives in and of the shop that surrounds it. Aside from that, everything else is illusion and lies. (ASSIS, 2008, p. 204)

Macedo takes the bird home, installs it in a garden with flowers and bushes, and starts studying it very hard, passionately, scientifically. Three weeks later, he returns to the same question.

The world, it answered, is a rather large garden with a fountain in the middle, flowers and shrubbery, lawns and fresh air and a bit of blue overhead; the canary, master of the world, inhabits a large, white circular cage whence it commands a view of it all. Everything else is illusion and lies. (ASSIS, 2008, p. 205)

The canary escapes during a nap of Macedo's employee, thus interrupting his research and experiments and causing him great grief. While visiting a friend in a farm nearby, he finds the canary, who greets him:

'Hey, Mr. Macedo, where have you been? You disappeared.'

It was the canary; it was on the branch of a tree. Just imagine how I felt, and what I said to him. My friend thought I was crazy, but why should the opinion of friends matter to me?

I spoke to the Canary tenderly, I asked him to come back so we could resume our conversation, in our world, the garden and the fountain, the veranda and white, circular cage.

'What garden? What fountain?'

'The world, dear friend.'

'What world? I must say, you haven't lost your professional quirks. The world,' he concluded solemnly, 'is an infinite, blue space, with the sun up above.'

I answered him indignantly, told him that if I were to go by his world, the world could be anything at all; and one time it had been a junk shop.

'Junk shop,' he trilled riotously, 'does such a place actually exist...?' (ASSIS, 2008, p. 206-207)

The end of the short story is both anecdotal and philosophical. Anecdotal not only because we know that canaries do not speak, but also because, as we enter the game of verisimilitude and accept that this canary speaks to Macedo (even if we theorize that it is all his imagination), what it says contradicts itself. We cannot believe Macedo and we cannot believe the canary either. But the short story is philosophical for its tautological dimension, for the truthfulness, so to speak, of its statements.

The canary enunciates truths that are punctual, verifiable, faithful to the context, but which, when confronted together, appear

contradictory, illogical, unable to ascend to a concept or even an idea. That is why we do not lose sight of the subtlety of the title, which alludes to the ideas of the canary. The question is always the same; the answers change.

The canary answers based on what it sees, the world is what is around it, is the sum of the existing objects, in which it believes, which it knows and recognizes. Therefore, there can be no doubt about them. What happened or what may happen does not interfere with what is. Memory can be confusing (*does such a place actually exist?*) and the future remains in the field of possibilities. But, with this movement, the canary philosopher also undermines any claim to metaphysics, transcendence, an intelligible, conceptual world, expressed by any immateriality. The world is appearance, is opinion. Therefore, to understand what the world is, one needs to learn and unlearn, one must consider the movement and plurality. One learns to see and consider what exists (appearance). One unlearns what, dislodged from concrete existence, will seek some idea of totality and universality to explain in conjunction what is always singular and plural.

Singular world: each object is a unique object and cannot be duplicated. There is no original and copy, since only by external attribute can one judge similarities and differences, leaving to each thing that exists its most perfect singularity, its radical difference (ROSSET, 1985). Plural world: the idea of the world does not erase the existing ones that constitute it, and can be expressed only by the plural enumeration of each existence.

That is why the statement of the world is reduced to the tautology: the world is the world. Such evidence, says Clément Rosset (1997, p. 51), is one of the most difficult to think about, for it presumes bypassing the double, that is, the statements that, escaping tautology, or taking advantage of false tautologies, also escape the real – or its undesirable aspects.

And here it is necessary to dissociate from the idea of tautology any notion of

poverty of expression or of thought. Thinking and expressing the world in a non tautological way is not to yield to the call of seeking *outside the world* its meaning, the elements that constitute it; it is, rather, to exercise the *expression of the world* from the world and in the world itself. Therefore, tautology is not the impossibility of expressing the world, but it rejects the expression that wants to replace it or add to it what does not participate in it.

Thus, to understand the Machadian view of the world, the confrontation between Wittgenstein (1968) and Rosset (1997) is recommended.

Wittgenstein (1968, p. 106) states: "*Roughly speaking*: to say of *two* things that they are identical is nonsense, and to say of *one* thing that it is identical with itself is to say nothing" (5.5303). Therefore, his conclusion is that the tautological expression is empty of meaning, as he says in 4.461 (p. 87). We would, thus, be deadlocked: either a tautology that says the already said, shows the already seen, or a contradiction, which says nothing of what it is.

But, besides this sense, in Wittgenstein there are, according to Rosset's reading (1997), two other great features of tautology: its constitution as a *model of truth* and the dissociation of this model of truth from a *principle of reality*.

As a model of truth, the tautology is a condition to assert that a proposition is true. Thus, any proposition that is not tautological would be indisputably false. A set of truths is the set of generalizations of this truth that is called tautology. The logical demonstration takes place in 4.461: "the tautology has no truth conditions for it is unconditionally true; and the contradiction is on no condition true" (WITTGENSTEIN, 1968, p. 87).

Following, proposition 4.462 dismisses the possibility of the tautology picturing reality:

Tautology and contradiction are not pictures of the reality. They present no possible state of affairs. For the one allows

every possible state of affairs, and this *none*.

In the tautology, the conditions of agreement with the world – the presenting relations – cancel one another, so that in no presenting relation to reality. (WITTGENSTEIN, 1968, p. 87)

Wittgenstein (1968, p. 72) elects to picture reality precisely the proposition, which is in the field of possibilities, that is, it is no guarantee of truth (tautology) or falsehood (a contradiction), as presented in 4.021 – "The proposition is a picture of reality" – or in 4.023 – "the proposition is the description of a state of affairs. "

As "the truth of tautology is certain, of propositions possible, of contradiction impossible" (4.464), tautology is dissociated from picturing reality. I cannot, by the description of the world, ensure that its reality is true, although I may, by tautology, state that the world is the world, thus picturing a true reality. But listing tautologically what is equal to itself does not determine, does not define reality, or rather does not say anything about anything.

Although strictly logical, the philosophy of Wittgenstein closes on itself, i. e., it reduces the tautology to a language game, making language itself a barrier against the real. Philosophy as a logical game, restricted to its language, could not *think*, *weigh* the world, constituting itself *despite* the world. His philosophy, contrary to metaphysics, would send us to the same impossibility. Whereas metaphysics throws us into a *beyond* reality, the Wittgensteinian tautology holds us forever in an impassable *far from reality*.

In this respect, Wittgenstein (1968, p. 111) contributes to the understanding of the tautology made explicit in *A Canary's Ideas* "*The limits of my language* mean the limits of my world" (5.6); "That the world is *my* world shows itself in the fact that the limits of the language (the language which only I understand) mean

the limits of *my world*" (5.62); "The world and life are one" (5.621); "I am my world" (5.63).

In fact, the canary does nothing other than limiting its world to its language, which, in this case, corresponds to its vision. This means that the canary describes the world in a tautological way, defining it *precisely* as what it sees. Everything else is false. Therefore, when the bird changes its environment (or world), its definition of world follows its look (its language). In other words: the definition of the world will always be limited to its linguistic possibility of defining it.

Hence, there is a logical conclusion: like Wittgenstein, the canary is not wrong to say that the world is what it sees, that is, the tautology actually works as a model of truth. Who can say that tautology – that is the expression of the identity of a thing with itself – is not true if it expresses precisely that the thing is the thing?

But Machado's short story is richer than that, because the canary will resort to the tautological resource at different times, causing noise in the formula. The first time the canary is asked, it says the world is the junk shop and everything else is illusion and lies. The second time, it says it is the garden and everything else is illusion and lies. The third time, it claims it is the blue sky and everything else is illusion and lies. Now, the first part of the statement – the tautological statement – is always true, while the second one (*everything else is illusion and lies*) is always unverifiable.

It follows that, contrary to what Wittgenstein asserts, the tautology pictures reality, while the proposition does not. The proposition may picture possible worlds, but also impossible ones, because language can express what exists and what does not, what can be thought and what cannot be thought, what can be seen, touched, felt and what cannot. I believe, unlike Wittgenstein, that it is not language that delimits the world; logic does. No wonder his philosophy leads to silence: "What cannot be spoken about must be passed over in silence" (WITTGENSTEIN, 1968, p. 129).

Thus, Wittgenstein shifts the problem of knowledge, which was based on the relationship between consciousness and reality, to the relationship between language and reality. In a way, his work aims to bridge the language to find the reality of what is unsayable. Such an approach is contrary to that adopted by Machado's fiction, which denies what is unspeakable in favor of the assertion of a reality that can always be expressed by language.

Therefore, whereas Wittgenstein concludes that the tautology is poor, Rosset (1997) asserts its expressive richness, when considering that the tautological formula means not only a logical relationship, but also the reality of things, as in the tradition inaugurated by Parmenides and Antisthenes. After studying false tautologies, Rosset (1997, p. 33) presents his conclusion: the tautology, or principle of identity, cannot be reduced to the formula "A = A", but only to the formula "A is A". In the first, one assumes that there are two terms, which must match: the term A must be equal to another term, also A. In the second formula, A is A, i.e., it is itself, and only it, not another.

That is what the canary of the short story did: it expressed a world that was the world and not another term that were equivalent to the world. But the humor of the story, which is also a critique of a certain presumption of science, lies in the fact that the *owner* of the canary just wants to find a definition of the world that is its double, i.e., that is equivalent to the explanation of the world. Explaining, which in Latin is *unfolding* and which in science is a methodological procedure, carries the risk of doubling, duplicating, transforming what is one into two, making a certain A be equal to its own A (A = A). What should the world be for the scientist to appease his curiosity about the canary?

Differently, the canary's answer is to make A be A, that is, to give expressiveness to the world so that its definition coincides with the formula *the world is the world*. Opposing Wittgenstein, Rosset (1997) affirms the richness of the tautology, since it provides the evidence

of the uniqueness of the real, which makes it identical only to itself, without the possibility that the real is anything else but itself.

Thus, the Machadian tautology, as an expressive resource of his literature, seeks to highlight the world, what exists in the world, the relations between men, conventions and circumstantial variables.

Analogously to the Machadian procedure, this is the pedagogical task that education presupposes in the tragic register: make the world speak. And this is the difference from the other pedagogies: while the non-tragic thought makes the world speak of diverse worlds, of a world other than itself, the tragic thought makes the world talk about its *own uni-verse*, its own *uniqueness*, so that the world is nothing other than itself.

From the point of view of education, it is what Nietzsche posited with his motto of turning into what one is. Larrosa (2009) examines other related terms, such as looking for oneself, *educating oneself*, *cultivating oneself* and *knowing oneself*, to establish a Nietzschean route in which education appears not as a method to be followed a priori, but in which *getting to be what one is* includes experience, wandering, admitting the impossibility of knowing:

The route toward the subject still has to be invented, always in a unique way, and it can avoid neither uncertainty nor detours. On the other hand, here it is not reason that serves as a guide, consciously setting the goals and imperatives and prefiguring the straight path, but rather the instincts, the underground force. (LARROSA, 2009, p. 64)

That is, in a way, the method employed by Brás Cubas in his *Posthumous Memoirs*, which are posthumous so that he has greater freedom to expose the evidences of the world in which he lived. In this perspective, narrating oneself, giving expression to experience, establishing unlearnings, exposing one's own choices, yielding to the insignificance of the

pleasures and pains experienced is to reflect on an educational program which does not have a purpose established beforehand, but which opens to chance, to random encounters, to the unpredictability of life and the irrationality of the world.

Therefore, education in the tragic register – which is philosophically equivalent to the pedagogy of choice, learning to unlearn or educational program – boils down to two main objectives: 1) to highlight the real (its tragic, insignificant condition, the chance of existence), that is, to make it speak, to give poetic, philosophical, tautological, literary, symbolic, imaginary, aesthetic expressiveness; and 2) to enjoy the joy of unconditional approval of the real, i. e., to celebrate the existence including its more painful, unpleasant and indigestible aspects, not because there is some sort of pleasure in pain, but because of the condition itself of unconditional approval, which consists of, in affirming life, affirming it fully.

The three possible choices

In the face of the tragic, there are three possible existential choices, choices of pedagogical order, because they modify the very way life is lived: one chooses to refuse life entirely, which means the choice of suicide; or one chooses to approve it provisionally under certain conditions, which means the choice of illusion; or one chooses to approve it fully, which is the tragic choice, which accepts existence as it stands, with its ephemerality, instability, insignificance, with its artifices, possibilities, conventions, finally, with what one is given to live. And this approval is already an expression of joy of living, of joy of knowing that one is alive, albeit provisional. Even in the face of the worst possible reality, one is able to ratify the desire to live.

Now, there is such a joy and one experiences it daily without resorting to any form of justification (since each of these forms

of justification is considered unthinkable and unbelievable by tragic philosophy). Hence the tragic reversal of the problems of the human need for satisfaction: the jubilation does not lack here – it is, instead, *too much*. Nothing can handle it; hence its inexhaustible character (which defines quite precisely the amazement typical of the tragic philosopher: his wonder is that joy is, not the pain). Inexhaustible because *nothing*, by definition, could ever dry a source that *nothing* feeds. (ROSSET, 1989a, p. 54-55)

This irrational and unjustified joy is not an optimistic, candid or serene view of the world. On the contrary, it appears precisely in what is worse: in the insignificant character of life, fraught with pain and suffering, whose hope of happiness is always frustrated. In Machado's work, the painting of unpleasant realities is never done with brushstrokes of indignation, anger or disapproval; rather, it appears with paints laden with indifference and mainly humor, and the undeniable pleasure of aesthetic achievement. The proliferation of references, the taste for well-turned phrases, endless digressions, intense and ironic dialogues with the reader – at the heart of Machado's work, there is this contrast, this unresolved tension between what is worst in life and the desire to live, expression of a tragic approval.

In the mythological imaginary, there are the same three perspectives: full approval, conditional approval and denial of existence.

The first mythological, primitive orders are affirmative; they embrace life as it is. [...] The only way to affirm life is to affirm it up to its root, to its hideous rotten basis. That kind of statement is found in primitive rites. (CAMPBELL, 2008, p. 32)

Life here is admitted in confluence with death, that is, in a continuous cycle of devouring and reproduction, laceration and agglutination. Life is a hideous presence, is flesh that rots, a mouth that devours, a body that smells, defecates, releases moods, milk, blood, tears or sperm. This is the matrix of the

myth of Dionysus. This is the realization that Nietzsche recognizes as tragic wisdom.

Also according to Campbell (2008, p. 32-33), around the eighth century BC, there is an inversion. Mythologies of retreat, denial, resignation, that is, of denial of life, arise. Although they do not encourage suicide, they guide men to refuse to eat anything that looks alive. The goal is to abandon the desire to live.

The third mythological system starts between the eleventh and seventh centuries BC and believes in the possibility of transforming the world.

By means of prayers, good deeds or other acts, it is possible to change the basic principles, the fundamental preconditions of life. You affirm the world on condition that it follows your conception of what it should be like. (CAMPBELL, 2008, p. 34)

In Western history, this third set of mythologies prevails. It approves of life conditionally. This does not mean that the other two perspectives are absent; rather, it means that they have exerted less influence, although the unconditional affirmation of life is present in several works, such as those of Montaigne, Gracián, Nietzsche, Clément Rosset and Machado de Assis. Though diverse in terms of the purposes and formulations, they have in common the same realization of the *fatality* of life and a kind of joy of living which values the present, the occasion, the small everyday choices that arise from the existential choice of approval.

The pedagogy of choice means the reflection on the educational processes using the tragic thought: first, it is necessary to allow the tragic to be thought, seen, (re) presented, rather than hidden, denied or duplicated. Secondly, it is necessary that the three mythological perspectives that are part of our cultural history are seriously considered as three attitudes toward existence and especially toward life itself. Third, one must recognize the creative and interpretative participation of men

in the circulation of the symbolic goods that make up culture. This means that we create meanings for our existence or we appropriate certain meanings or narratives available so that we can understand ourselves by understanding the world (RICOEUR, 2008).

This appreciation of the existential trajectory, of the interpretive journey, of the education of choice, of the narration of oneself, of the anthropological path includes the experience of approval. It is this pedagogical thinking that unfolds from the review of Machado's literature:

There is no reason to read him. It may be that, in a world where life is what we know it is, reading him may still be an experience of the gratuity of the authentic. He is an inventor. He is neither sweet nor docile. He does not propose reconciliation. What he says is fierce, with the abysmal humor of someone who gave up hope and

fear. [...] He does not flatter the reader. He does not expect anything from the reader. He often disregards the reader. He writes against the reader.

There is no reason to read him. But reading him can make the reader worse, happily worse: less distracted and credulous, less obliged and obedient, less conformist and stupid. Perhaps freer. (HANSEN, 2006, p. 344-345)

This *happily worse* route, of tragic character, characterizes the education feasible through the Machadian literature: on the one hand, loss of hope and fear, relativization of references of the meaning, of belief in the values, experience of *disillusionment*; on the other hand, adherence to circumstances, game of occasion, the revelation of chance and the approval of existence. This is the freedom possible that his work can mediate, based on learning to unlearn.

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