

Ensaio
Essay

**PAUL B. DIXON:
RETIRED DREAMS**

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Resenhando-se a obra de Paul B. Dixon, *Retired dreams*, destacam-se as teses mais inovadoras desse crítico sobre o romance *Dom Casmurro*. A principal é que Machado de Assis, do interior do modelo realista, teria desenvolvido uma escritura consciente do caráter arbitrário e diferencial da linguagem, tocando o âmago da literariedade ao construir a fala do herói como instrumento epistemológico marcado pela retórica. Essa busca de conhecimento sobre a história vivida com Capitu não só expressaria a condição de simulacro da obra literária, denunciando a instância narrativa, mas exporia o artificialismo dos códigos sócio-políticos e de gênero, possibilitando a contestação da sociedade patriarcal pelo viés da narração ambígua.

Arguably the greatest of Machado de Assis' novels, *Dom Casmurro* has long both fascinated and confounded its readers. Brilliant though it is, however, *Dom Casmurro* has been a long time in gaining the international recognition that it and its author so richly deserve.¹ A masterpiece of ambiguity, this extraordinarily subtle and complex narrative continues to defy any narrow pigeonholing even as it generates an ever increasing number of book-length critical studies devoted to it.

One of the most recent of these is Paul B. Dixon's *Retired Dreams: Dom Casmurro, Myth and Modernity*, which, viewing *Dom Casmurro* mythically and in the context of Western literary history, argues that it is a landmark work, one that marks, "... the end of one era and the beginning of another".² Taking the position that *Dom Casmurro* must be regarded as both a nineteenth century novel and as a twentieth century novel (even the date of its appearance – 1899 and Paris versus 1900 and Rio de Janeiro – is open to question) Dixon advances seven main arguments: that *Dom Casmurro*, "... is about epistemology" (128); that it does not easily yield any clear-cut ideological conclusions (128); that it is "A landmark of literary ambiguity" (129) and that "ambivalence" emerges, in this text, as "... a valid conclusion" about it; that Bento is "... an essentialist" who seeks to define himself in and through the context of a deeply patriarchal system while Capitu, the "anima figure", is, "... a microcosm for the entire world" (129); that *Dom Casmurro* systematically (and effectively) exploits four major tropes – metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony – as a set of, "... transformational rules" that effect the displacement from myth to "modern, realistic" fiction (125); that *Dom Casmurro* can be read as an ironic recasting of the quest myth and that

Bento is an ironically presented mythic hero "engaged in a fight to the death with a powerful dragon . . . time" (109) as well as involved in the ebb and flow of a series of metaphorically and metonymically rendered rebirth archetypes" (51); and that, finally, *Dom Casmurro* mounts a discourse on the relative merits of two contrasting value systems, patriarchy (Bentinho/Bento/"Dom Casmurro") and matriarchy (Capitu). When not commenting specifically on these seven primary points, Dixon (following Tony Tanner) also considers *Dom Casmurro* as a novel about adultery, how it "prefigures" (9) what Carlos Fuentes summarizes as the definitive characteristics of the "New Novel" of Spanish America, and how it questions whether, in literature, textual meaning (or meaning that is derived from a specific text) is ever determinate (129).

Of all these important and lucidly presented themes, three seem, to this reviewer, at least, to be of exceptional significance for readers seriously interested in appreciating the magnitude of Machado's achievement in *Dom Casmurro*: the novel's profoundly epistemological foundation; the effect produced by its self-referential and self-sustaining web of tropes (especially metaphor and irony); and what might be construed as the contrast it establishes (implicitly) between patriarchy, epitomized in the narrator himself, "Dom Casmurro", and matriarchy (Capitu and all she may or may not represent), with the reader being assigned the task of deciding which is the more desirable system.

As a work of art, *Dom Casmurro's* primary brilliance lies in its subtle weaving of all these (and other) disparate elements into a seamless web of author, implied author, reader, implied reader and characters, with the narrator representing the latter category's self-conscious and possibly unreliable variety. Dixon makes it clear that the reader's reception of the plot's essential ambiguity – did Capitu commit adultery or did she not? – is "metaphorically derived" (5) from the (perhaps self-serving) self-conscious narrator's account of his ambiguous and problematic relationship with Capitu. The question of knowledge – who knows what, when, where and how? – thus lies, restively, at the heart of the novel.

Indeed, one might go so far as to say that this essentially epistemological problem is precisely the issue that *Dom Casmurro* develops so tellingly – and (in terms of much

twentieth-century literary theory) so presciently. Knowledge, Machado's text shows us, is inescapably metaphorical because it is inescapably the function of a linguistic system, which (according to such poststructuralist theoreticians as Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man, J. Hillis Miller, and Barbara Johnson) is itself "figurative" and "rhetorical", that is, constituted by the endless interplay of tropes. By stressing the epistemological "transformations" wrought by metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony, Dixon leads his reader to speculate whether Machado's primary "intention" (to borrow a term from E. D. Hirsch, Jr.) might have been to make us question the stability and even the "knowability" of truth itself rather than to render a verdict as to Capitu's guilt or innocence. To an extraordinary degree, then, as Dixon rightly suggests, *Dom Casmurro* can be shown to be fundamentally "about" the problem of "knowing".

As with all texts, *Dom Casmurro* not only sustains a variety of diverse (and even conflicting) readings, it generates them. Hence it is that while the epistemological dimension of *Dom Casmurro* might well be interpreted "deconstructively" (that hated and feared word!) as a discourse on what Saussure (only a few years after *Dom Casmurro* appeared) would call the "arbitrary" and "differential" nature of the linguistic sign, this same wonderful novel can be read socio-politically, as a subversively metaphoric commentary on the relative merits of patriarchal as opposed to matriarchal social structures. Deftly combining this latter reading of *Dom Casmurro* with the more linguistically based one and with the fluid relationships that exist between the author, the characters (including the self-conscious narrator/protagonist) and the reader, Dixon says:

Dom Casmurro reveals the conflict between patriarchy and matriarchy which underlies many social and individual tensions. At the same time, the novel suggests the analogous conflict between opposing modes of reading. It does this by means of a complex metaphoric play involving textual authority, authorship, and paternity (89).

To expand a bit on the methodological parameters established in Dixon's study, one can say that the move from viewing *Dom Casmurro* as a novel "about" adultery (as Tanner

and others see it) to a text "about" the unstable and arbitrary relationship between language and knowledge is paralleled by the basic differences between nineteenth century and twentieth century narrative. If we were to write a new history of the development of the novel as a literary genre in the Western tradition, we could easily see Machado and *Dom Casmurro* as providing the missing links between the "realism" of Dickens and Flaubert and the "modernism" of Joyce and Mann. So radical were Machado's experiments with such staples of narrative as structure, point of view, time and characterization that John Barth, whose *The Floating Opera* was deeply influenced by three of Machado's novels,³ has even described the Brazilian master as a "proto-post-modernist".⁴ What Barth admires in Machado's narratives, their multiple ironies, their artfully poised ambiguities and their inquisitive self-consciousness, stems not so much from their mimetically driven realism (of which there is a great deal, as critics like Dixon, Nunes, Caldwell, Schwarz, Sá Rego, and Gledson have shown),⁵ as from Machado's extensive and innovative cultivation of tropes, his anachronistic passion for creating fluid "texts" that epitomize what J. Hillis Miller believes is the purpose (and value) of deconstructive analysis: ". . . an attempt to interpret as exactly as possible the oscillations in meaning produced by the irreducibly figurative nature of language."⁶

When Dixon therefore speaks of *Dom Casmurro*'s structure as being primarily a function of four interrelated tropes (metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony) he would thus seem to be upholding the position taken by Miller and de Man who, in *Allegories of Reading* and elsewhere, conceives of "rhetoric" as the ceaseless jostling of tropes, the ebb and flow (like Capitu's famous eyes!) of their constant undercutting of each other. "Rhetoric", says de Man, "radically suspends logic and opens up vertiginous possibilities of referential aberration. . . I would not hesitate to equate the rhetorical, figural potencial of language with literature itself."⁷ The claim or object of a deconstructive reading of *Dom Casmurro*, then, would be to show that, on balance, the language of this text is more metaphoric (a point Dixon also makes) and figurative than mimetically realistic. Such a reading would further argue that "rhetoric" (defined as the interplay of tropes) inhibits and actually prevents, ". . . both

the mastery of the plain sense of texts" (which, in the case of *Dom Casmurro*, is traditionally said to be that Capitu is guilty of adultery) and, ". . . the mastery of reasoning. . ."⁸ (which casts Bento, the "weaker" character, as the "logical" victim of two "stronger", more "predatory" characters, Capitu and Escobar). Based on an understanding of language as a system of tropes, a deconstructive reading of *Dom Casmurro* thus challenges what appears to be the "plain sense" of its story (Capitu's guilt) and what is taken to be its apparent "logical meaning" (that adultery is bad and leads to unhappiness).

Additionally, however, what a deconstructive reading of *Dom Casmurro* also offers the reader is a glimpse of what makes this text seem to have been written much later than it was. By utilizing the perspective afforded as by Derrida, de Man, Miller and others, we can see that *Dom Casmurro* is only superficially about adultery and the manipulation of the weak by the strong; its real subject matter, one begins to feel, is the treachery of language. Misunderstanding — to say nothing of outright mendacity and duplicity — is, no matter how hard we try to eliminate it, a constant factor of human existence, and when, convinced (again by language) that we are "right" or that we understand "correctly", we act, we may find out too late that we were wrong or that we were mislead, by others, as "Dom Casmurro" wants the reader to join him in believing, or by ourselves. This latter point, cast here in the context of poststructuralist theory, will sound familiar to Machado scholars because it is consistent with Helen Caldwell's famous argument that the real tragedy of *Dom Casmurro* deals not with what Capitu did or did not do but with the tragic self-destruction of the narrator, the metamorphosis of the callow "Bentinho" into the irascible and bitter misanthrope, "Dom Casmurro".

Ironically enough, however, the argument for undertaking a deconstructive reading of *Dom Casmurro* is actually sustained by a consideration of what the novel has long been taken to be—a "realistic" study of adultery. A common motif (if not necessarily a theme) in Machado's work, adultery unquestionably plays an important role in the work. Indeed, that he has been the victim of an adulterous spouse (Capitu) is precisely what the self-conscious narrator/protagonist (a lawyer) wants the reader to believe. Less clear, however, is the more intriguing question of what "Dom

Casmurro" really thinks happened, what, deep in his heart of hearts, he believes truly transpired between he, his wife and his erstwhile best friend, Escobar. The reader cannot know (again the problem of epistemology) in any absolute sense what "Dom Casmurro" really thinks, although the codes of Western narrative lead us to believe him. Yet this "automatic" placing of our readerly trust in a narrator whose version of what "really" happened is open to question may well be the very narrative code that Machado wants to challenge. A great deal of time (always a disruptive and distorting force for Machado) has elapsed between the alleged adultery and "Dom Casmurro" 's narrating of this story. This means he has had ample time to wonder about the events (real and imagined) that took place, about how linguistically defined appearances can be deceiving (another of Machado's favorite themes), and, finally, about what he himself believed to be true about what happened. So while Machado gives infidelity an obvious and central role in *Dom Casmurro*, he is careful to "inhibit" the reader's easy acceptance of the adultery case that "Dom Casmurro" builds against Capitu and Escobar, this being the apparent "plain sense" of the story. Language itself can thus be read as the real antagonist in *Dom Casmurro*, the seductive but ultimately untrustworthy force that leads us to "see" what is not really there.

The result, echoing de Man's argument that the aura of control any text purports to possess ("Casmurro" labors assiduously to win the reader's sympathy by saying he is struggling always to "tell the truth") can be shown to be baseless, is that *Dom Casmurro* – again appearing more as a self-referential poststructuralist "text" than a "univocal" "book" or static "work" – emerges as a narrative in which every piece of textual evidence a reader can cite in support of an argument for Capitu's adultery can be offset or balanced off by another piece of textual evidence (or by a new interpretation of the same one) that undermines, neutralizes, or subverts the indicting evidence. Approached in this fashion, *Dom Casmurro* can easily be seen as a text structured around a concatenation of moments of perfect ambiguity or ambivalence as regards Capitu's supposed crime. Each reader, playing the role of jury member, must decide the issue, which, as in the courtroom, does not involve the "binary opposition" of truth versus falsity so much as the rendering of a

verdict, one based – in both cases – on self-conscious argumentation (“rhetoric”) by and through language. The outcome, in *Dom Casmurro* and as often occurs in the courtroom, is a hung jury; we as readers simply do not have the ability to know “beyond the shadow of doubt” who is guilty of what here.

The fascinating question in all this is why. Why does Machado’s text not provide some definitive “proof” that would allow the reader to “know” whether Capitu and Escobar had an illicit affair, as “Casmurro” claims they did? Master narrator that he was, Machado could certainly have made it clear who committed adultery (if anyone did), had he wanted to. The fact that he is so careful to keep this issue ambiguously poised before our eyes suggests, however, that he was not primarily interested in writing a novel “about adultery” or socio-political injustices (of which he was most assuredly aware) but about language and our relationship to it, about how we come to feel we “know” things and about the moral implications that derive from the actions we take because of what we think we “know”. Consequently, as Dixon aptly puts it, “Rather than beginning with a presumption of knowledge and proceeding to assert the moral truth, Machado’s novel explores the axioms that make moral discourse possible” (8).

Though in certain respects (its concrete description, for example) *Dom Casmurro* is a powerful example of why literary realism remains such an effective mode of writing, one feels that, on balance, its greater brilliance – its breathtaking singularity – may well lie in its pre-Saussurian implementation of language as an arbitrary, differentially based and semantically unstable system of self-referential signs. The real betrayal – the real adultery – in *Dom Casmurro* can therefore be seen as not having to do with Capitu (whatever we decide about her) but with language. Not only does language fail to do what we want it to do (truthfully represent reality), it can easily lead us (as it may have tragically lead Bento) into self-delusion, prevarication and hypocrisy.

Yet for all its affinities with the basic principles of poststructuralism, *Dom Casmurro*, like most great works of literature (and in this it remains fully consistent with a poststructuralist/deconstructionist reading of a text), can be interpreted in other, often radically contrastive ways. Indeed, some of the most interesting work in recent years on this and

other novels by Machado de Assis, such as Roberto Schwarz's *Ao Vencedor as Batatas* (1977) and John Gledson's *The Deceptive Realism of Machado de Assis: A Dissenting Interpretation of Dom Casmurro* (1984), comes from a distinctly socio-political and even Marxist perspective. Schwarz's study, for example, focusing on Machado's early "romantic" novels, presents a Machado de Assis keenly aware of the tensions and forces at work in his society and determined, in his own inimitable fashion, to reproduce them in his narratives. Gledson, following Schwarz's lead, takes a similar position, though he restricts his focus to *Dom Casmurro* and argues that it reflects a "special kind" of realism, one more subtle and sophisticated than, say, Dickens' but one less "modernistic" or avant-garde than Proust's.

Superbly done though these works are, they do not, I believe, adequately address the essential critical question: where does the genius of Machado de Assis lie? Is it to be found in his "realism", special or otherwise, or does it reside in his eclectic and experimental concept of narrative, his understanding of the ever-changing relationship between author, text and reader, between language, reality and human consciousness? An open minded consideration of Machado's works would seem, to this reviewer, at least, to weigh heavily in favor of the latter choice.

Another important recent book on Machado, Maria Luisa Nunes' *The Craft of an Absolute Winner* (1983) takes a somewhat similar position, offering a narratological approach to his nine novels. An additional critical study, Enylton de Sá Rego's *O Calundo e a Panacéia* (1989), which discusses Machado's narratives as examples of Menippean satire, stands somewhere in between Nunes' text-based analysis and the socio-political tact taken by Schwarz and Gledson.

Sá Rego's approach, moreover, has something in common with a pair of essays by Alfred MacAdam⁹ that, developing the parodic thesis advanced by Emir Rodríguez Monegal,¹⁰ considers both *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas* and *Dom Casmurro* as satires, yet satires in which the trope of metaphor (rather than metonymy) predominates. Recalling the famous study by Roman Jakobson (who equated metonymy with realism and metaphor with modernism),¹¹ the reader is again led to feel that Machado's texts are, on balance, more "modernistic" than they are "realistic".

Ironically enough, it is precisely from this ambiguous wedding of metaphor and metonymy (which Dixon describes in terms of "Realism and Anti-Realism") that Machado establishes the possibility that one can indeed read his texts as examples of narrative realism. Although critics have long felt comfortable reading at least the post-1888 Machado as a "realist", the question of what kind of realist, as Gledson's recent work shows, has remained a very controversial point. In an important 1959 essay, the eminent Brazilian critic, Massaud Moisés, argued for a consideration of Machado as a "psychological realist", a writer who, in contrast to the externally oriented norms of such nineteenth-century realists as Balzac, Dickens, Eliot, and Howell, sought the psychological divagations associated with what he termed "interior realism".¹² This is basically the same critical approach that had earlier led Samuel Putnam to make his well-known comparison of Henry James and Machado,¹³ with the Brazilian master getting higher marks because of his more profound "sabiduria" and because of what Putnam felt was the greater depth of Machado's psychological portraits.

Yet, as Dixon points out, the case for "external realism" in *Dom Casmurro* can be forcefully made; indeed, critics like Schwarz, Gledson and others have argued persuasively that the significance of this dimension of Machado's art cannot be minimized. Dixon's own study, for however much it stresses the importance of tropes (an argument that seems to parallel de Man's and Miller's notion of "rhetoric") in Machado's texts, also adds credence to the mimetic approach. By presenting Bento Santiago as, "... a searcher for the System. . .", as a man, "... on a quest for Truth, Meaning, Communion - a quest for a system holding the keys to the fullness of life" (11), Dixon invites the reader to interpret him ideologically - and therefore "phallogocentrically" - as a privileged male member of a rigidly patriarchal power structure. The great drama of *Dom Casmurro* is not, as we have speculated, the adultery (imagined or real) of Capitu; it is, as Caldwell has shown, the self-destructive struggle taking place within Bento's soul, a struggle that is based, at least in part, on the frustration and inadequacy he may feel at not being able to "measure up" to the demands placed on him by his patriarchal society. Bento's "friend" and business associate, Escobar, however, epitomizes the codes of conduct prized by this society,

a facet of their relationship that is painfully evident to Bento. But because the story is not about Escobar but Bento, it could be his gradual (though repressed) realization of his "failure," a condition exacerbated by the perverting force of jealousy and given form via language, that eventually renders him an embittered and isolated old man, a "Dom Casmurro".

Standing in opposition to what a poststructuralist critic might call the distorting "phallogocentrism" of the society that impresses a specific gender identity on Bento (and that, one could argue, twists him into a "Dom Casmurro") is Capitu, the alleged adulterer but a character who, at least in the second half of the novel (the part dominated, ironically, by Bento), comes to embody the more resurrective values of a matriarchal society. Although, as Dixon observes, Bento's patriarchy (the quest myth) and Capitu's matriarchy (the myth of rebirth) are carefully intertwined, the reader who is more sensitive to the tragic problem of "Casmurro's" "death in life" (which anticipates by some twenty years Eliot's use of similar, ironically based patterns of myth in "The Waste Land") than to the illicit love affair that Capitu may or may not have had will be led to question not only the narrator's motives in writing the text that is *Dom Casmurro* (does he want to exculpate himself from the guilt he suspects may be rightly his for effectively destroying people who may have been innocent of any wrong doing?) but the morality of a society that assigns people narrowly defined identities based on class, race and sex.

If one accepts this reading of *Dom Casmurro* as possible, the one must entertain the sharply ideological conclusion that Machado de Assis is mounting, through an intricately woven web of allusions, tropes, ironies, varying modes of discourse and multiple narrative relationships, a direct assault on the power structures and moral dogma of his time and place. Although such a sociological interpretation has long been advocated by critics interested in politicizing Machado, it is ironic (and therefore quintessentially Machadoan) that the basic validity of this approach is simultaneously strengthened and weakened by the more poststructuralist/deconstructive reading discussed earlier in which the text that is *Dom Casmurro* can be shown to be based on an endless free play of moments of undecidability (what poststructuralists call moments of aporia) where ambiguity reigns

supreme, where the text simply will not offer up the kind of logocentric (or phallogocentric) "truth", certainty and stability that we are all programed to want and to expect in our novels.

That we can read *Dom Casmurro*, then, as both the epitome of a self-deconstructing text and as an outstanding example of realistic narrative leads us to speculate, finally, on the importance of Machado de Assis to what I term the "female (or 'matriarchal') voice" in Brazilian literature, a topic I am currently laboring to develop into a book-length study. It has long been my contention that, in general terms, the literature of Brazil – like much of Brazil's culture – has tended to subvert or at least ignore the rigid codes of conduct demanded by the ruling classes of its patriarchal society. I believe, indeed, that Brazilian literature, conceived of here as both a reflection and an extension of Brazilian culture, can easily be read as being (like Capitu) essentially "matriarchal", as a national literature that undermines or at least questions the legitimacy and supposed superiority of Western patriarchal systems. A feminist interpretation of *Dom Casmurro*, to say nothing of Machado's other works, could provide valuable insights into the many and varied subtexts that, collectively, give his work such extraordinary range, diversity and appeal.

Yet within the context of Brazilian literature I believe we can see Machado – giant though he is – as but one more in a long tradition of non-conventional, iconoclastic, and strikingly original writers. Prominent on this list are many of Brazil's most famous literary figures, including such luminaries as Gregório de Matos, Antônio Vieira, José de Alencar, Machado de Assis, Euclides da Cunha, Oswald de Andrade, Jorge Amado, Graciliano Ramos, Rachel de Queiroz, Lygia Fagundes Telles, Nélida Piñon, Guimarães Rosa, Clarice Lispector, Osman Lins, Hilda Hilst and Lya Luft, to name only a few. For all their many differences, what these Brazilian writers have in common is a vibrantly anti-authoritarian spirit, a passion for doing things differently, for challenging, implicitly and explicitly, the accepted, orthodox ways of seeing, doing and thinking. If one considers that in Brazil, as elsewhere, the "accepted", "official", and "canonical" standards are male dominated ("phallogocentric"), then one can also see that Brazilian literature has had a history of presenting women as being powerful, free-thinking and aggressive.

I do not mean to imply that this surprising representation of women is the only one to be found in Brazilian letters, for to do so would be patently absurd. I mean, simply, that for reasons that are difficult to explain (though they are undoubtedly at least partly cultural in nature) Brazil – a country whose oppressive legal code and cultural mores would seem to preclude it – has long generated images of women that defy or challenge the orthodox, patriarchal standards of what they should be like.

I also believe, moreover, that this unusual literary treatment of female characters has been cultivated not only by women (as one would expect) but also by men (which one would not expect, given Brazil's sexist socio-economic structures). We have only to look at such authors and works as Alencar's *Senhora*, Oswald de Andrade's *Serafim Ponte Grande*, Rachel de Queiroz's *As três Marias*, Clarice Lispector's *Perto do Coração Selvagem*, Darcy Ribeiro's *Matra* and Nélida Piñon's *A República dos Sonhos* to see this powerfully subversive, decentering and gender-blurring matriarchal tendency at work.

The same argument, however, can be made for Machado de Assis, whose many works in prose, poetry and drama are extensively populated with memorable and compelling female characters. Outstanding among these, however, is the fascinating and enigmatic figure of Capitu, who may have been, at least in part, a product of Machado's reading of the similarly potent female protagonist in Alencar's *Senhora*. If my theory of Brazilian literature – that it has historically been characterized by the vital and (in opposition to the rigid and exclusive norms of its patriarchal social structures) destabilizing presence of what I would call its "female voice" – has validity, we should be able to see this unique quality in comparison to other national literatures, especially those of the United States, Canada or Spanish America, nations which present a cultural and historical background not totally unlike that of Brazil.

In a recent doctoral dissertation, Judy Payne has looked into this complex issue and, restricting her analysis to a comparison of representative "new novels" from Spanish America and Brazil, concludes that the Brazilian "novo romance" is more profoundly revolutionary than its better known Spanish American counterpart and that this is so because while it is technically as avant-garde as the "nueva novela" it goes much further in obliterating the

gender-based dichotomy between men and women.¹⁴ Payne argues convincingly that the Brazilian "new novel" (she focuses chiefly on Lispector's *Perto do Coração Selvagem* and *Água Viva*, Rosa's *Grande Sertão: Veredas* and Osman Lins' *Avalovara*) went much further than the Spanish American "nueva novela" in establishing new and more fluid kinds of socio-political, psychological and sexual identities and relationships between men and women. For Payne, then, it is not surprising that Hélène Cixous would have found, in the extraordinary texts of Clarice Lispector, the quintessence of what she would term "l'écriture féminine",¹⁵ a "new" kind of writing (one indebted to Derrida's deconstructive sense of "écriture") that would come to have considerable worldwide influence in the closing decades of the twentieth century.

Fascinatingly, however, one could argue (as I have tried to do here, if only in cursory form) that this "new writing", a writing that, through its techniques, its themes and its characters, challenges the validity of patriarchal society, found its first great expression in the works of Machado de Assis, especially his masterpiece, *Dom Casmurro*.

Lucidly written and cogently argued, Paulo Dixon's *Retired Dreams* successfully casts this marvelous if relatively little known novel in the context of mythically based world literature and as the harbinger of a new kind of writing, one that, both ironic and figurative in mode, is acutely aware of its own inescapable status as verbal artifice, as self-referential text, at the same time that it presents itself as a subversive socio-political document. As such, Paul Dixon's concise and very readable study most certainly makes an estimable contribution to the small but fast-growing list of English language works that deal with this singular – and singularly complex – novel.

NOTES

¹ I am happy to report that this deplorable situation may finally be changing. At my urging, the editors (Brain Wilkie and James Hurt) of the widely used anthology, *Literature of the Western World*, have seen fit to include Machado (and the short story, "Dona Paula") in the 2nd edition of their fine work (New York: Macmillan, 1988, Vol. 2: 1352-1360). Machado's inclusion here (which marks the first time he has ever

appeared in such an anthology) should go a long way toward freeing him from the neglect that he has suffered from for so long.

² Dixon, *Retired Dreams*; Dom Casmurro, Myth and Modernity. West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue Research Foundation, 1989, p. 5. All further references to this work will be included parenthetically in the text.

³ See, Earl Fitz, "The Influence of Machado de Assis on John Barth's *The Floating Opera*", *The Comparatist* 10 (May 1986): 56-66.

⁴ Comment made in a letter from Mr. Barth to Fitz, 3 April 1984.

⁵ See, in addition to the Dixon book being reviewed here, Maria Luisa Nunes, *The Craft of an Absolute Winner* (Greenwood, 1983), Helen Caldwell, *The Brazilian Othello of Machado de Assis* (University of California, 1960) and *Machado de Assis* (University of California, 1970), Roberto Schwarz, *Ao Vencedor as Batatas* (Duas Cidades, 1977), Enylton de Sá Rego, *O Cabundu e a Panacéia* (Forense Universitária, 1989), and John Gledson, *The Deceptive Realism of Machado de Assis* (Francis Cairns, 1984).

⁶ J. Hillis Miller, "The Function of Rhetorical Study of the Present Time," *ADE Bulletin* (September-November 1979), n° 62:13.

⁷ Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 10.

⁸ J. Hillis Miller, "The Two Rhetorics: George Eliot's Bestiary", *Writing and Reading Differently*, G. Douglas Atkins and Michael L. Johnson, editors (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1985), p. 113.

⁹ Alfred MacAdam, *Modern Latin American Narratives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977). p. 1-28.

¹⁰ Emir Rodríguez Monegal, *The Borzoi Anthology of Latin American Literature*, Vol. II (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977). p. xiv; see also, MacAdam, *Textual Confrontation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 20-23; 26. Here, MacAdam argues that parody, which, along with satire, fantasy and caricature, characterizes Machado's approach to the novel form, has emerged as the hallmark of modern Latin America narrative and that (as we see epitomized in Machado's case) this tendency has flown in the face of Realism (p. 21).

¹¹ Roman Jakobson, "Two Aspects of Language and Two Aspects of Aphasical Disturbances", *Fundamentals of Language* (The Hague: Mouton, 1956), p. 55-82, esp. 76-82.

¹² Massaud Moisés, "Machado de Assis e o realismo", *Anhembi* 35, n° 105 (1959): 469-79.

¹³ Samuel Putnam, *Marvelous Journey* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948). pp. 176-92.

¹⁴ Judy Payne, Ph. D. dissertation, Penn State University, Earl E. Fitz, director, 1990.

¹⁵ See, Earl Fitz, "Hélène Cixous' Debt to Clarice Lispector: The Case of *Vivre L'Orange*", in the *Revue de Littérature Comparée*, forthcoming (1990).