

THE CYNICAL GAZE:  
THE USE OF HUMOR IN MACHADO DE ASSIS AND MARK TWAIN

by

SARAH MARTIN

(Under the Direction of SUSAN C. QUINLAN)

ABSTRACT

Humor in literature as a stylistic choice can have various implications ranging from merely seeking to amuse one's audience to wishing to promote some sort of change in society. It is in this latter area that two of the most prolific writers of their time, Machado de Assis from Brazil and Mark Twain from the United States, will write their works. Instead of merely seeking to entertain, these writers use their humor to challenge their "enemies," be they specific people or merely ideas that they find displeasing. By rendering an obstacle "ridiculous," one is able to destroy its power. In the case of these two authors, they sought to point out the ridiculous, and often hypocritical, nature of the people around them. My research has shown that neither was familiar with the work of the other, so to understand the reasons behind their similarity of style one has to look more closely at the influences of the time period in which they lived. The nineteenth century, an epoch of great social and political change around the world, with great advancements in science and technology, by its nature created a fertile ground for writers to use their skills to point out the foibles and hypocrisies of their own culture. In order to better discuss the way in which these authors make their criticism by their use of humor, I will consider three areas of their writing – those of human vanity, politics, and religion. Within each will be a

number of subsets, each of which will show the way in which humorous language attempts to poke holes in whatever social foible the author wishes to break down.

INDEX WORDS: Machado de Assis, Mark Twain, Nineteenth Century, Realism, Humor,  
Literature

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION – THE ASSAULT OF LAUGHTER

*“O melhor prólogo é o que contem menos coisas,  
ou o que as diz de um jeito obscuro e truncado.”*

*--Machado de Assis, Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas*

*“My works are like water. The works of the great masters  
are like wine. But everyone drinks water.”*

*--Mark Twain, Notebook, 1885*

In his story “The Mysterious Stranger” (1916), the American humorist and writer Mark Twain stated, “Against the assault of laughter nothing can stand” (91). One can see in these words that there is a much deeper purpose behind an author’s choice to write in such a way as to evoke this festive reaction; instead of merely seeking to amuse the audience, the writer uses his humor to challenge his “enemies,” be they specific people or merely ideas that they find displeasing. By rendering an obstacle “ridiculous,” one is able to destroy its power. The nineteenth century, an epoch of great social and political change around the world, by its nature created a fertile ground for writers to use their skills to point out the foibles and hypocrisies of their own culture. It is from this standpoint that I will demonstrate how two of the best authors of their time, Machado de Assis from Brazil and Mark Twain from the United States, launch their attack on society through their greatest weapon – humor.

In order to better discuss the way in which these authors make their criticism by their use of humor, I will consider three areas of their writing –human vanity, politics, and religion. Within each will be a number of subsets, each of which will show the way in which humorous language attempts to poke holes in whatever social foible the author wishes to break down. Prior to beginning the analyses, I will take a look at each author’s style and society to consider how the time period in which they lived may have affected their works, as well as set out the main terms to be used throughout this study.

When one reads the works of Machado de Assis and Mark Twain, one can notice a strong similarity between their styles. However, there has been little done as far as research comparing the two. Recently, after the publication of Twain’s new autobiography (released in 2010), an article by Peter Robb appeared in *The Monthly* entitled “Parallel Lives,” which combined a review of this book with some basic comparisons between Twain and two other authors of his

time period – Russia’s Anton Chekhov and Brazil’s Machado de Assis. Robb discusses the humble beginnings of all three, as well as some of the commonalities in their styles: “None lost his empathy for the people of his poor beginnings or that sense of cruelty and futility that veined the comedy. Each kept his ear for plain speech and the social drama freighting it, his way of catching words on the wing” (Robb). Although it also lauds Machado’s writing, the majority of this article is focused on Twain.

It may not be surprising that there is little done to directly compare these two authors. Although living and writing during almost identical periods, it is doubtful that they ever met in person, or that Twain was familiar with Machado’s work. Although a world traveler, it does not appear that Twain ever visited Brazil. Nor did he read Portuguese; David R. Sewell comments on Twain’s “little German and less French” (51), and makes no mention at all of Portuguese. Machado’s writings were not translated into English until 1921, when three of his short stories – “O enfermeiro,” (1884) “Viver,” (1896) “and “A cartomante” (1884) – appeared in a collection entitled *Brazilian Tales*, edited by Isaac Goldberg. Machado’s more famous novels, such as *Dom Casmurro* (1899), *Quincas Borba* (1891) and *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas* (1881), did not appear in English translations until the 1950s when they were released by Noonday Press (Patai 90). It is therefore very unlikely that Twain read anything by this Brazilian contemporary.

It also seems unlikely that Machado was familiar with Twain’s work. Machado’s literature contains numerous references to and citations from authors that he read, showing the extent of his knowledge of world literature, in particular works from Europe. *Machado de Assis.net*, a website created by the Fundação Casa de Rui Barbosa and others, contains a search engine that takes a researcher directly to mentions of a particular author within Machado’s works. Twain’s name is not mentioned here, and as Machado’s penchant for foreign literature

seemed to be geared more towards Europe rather than the United States, it is also unlikely that he was a great reader of Twain. This is not to say that he never read American writers – one does find allusions to such people as Longfellow and Edgar Allen Poe. However it would seem to be safe to assume that neither Machado nor Twain were familiar with the other's oeuvre, a fact made all the more interesting by the similarities in their works that I will examine in later chapters of this study.

### **The Authors – Style and Influence**

Let us then take each author individually and discuss their respective writing style and techniques. Machado de Assis lived from 1839 – 1908, the grandson of slaves and the son of *agregados*. Roberto Schwarz talks at length about Machado's life and the effect it had on his work in the article "Machado de Assis: A Biographical Sketch." Schwarz discusses how certain elements of Machado's personal makeup, notably his dark skin, stammer, epilepsy, and the fact that his father was a house painter, are often used as markers of how difficult it was for him to succeed as he did. However, this critic makes the argument that Machado's career may in fact have been "tranquil rather than tempestuous" (Schwarz 79), due in large part to the very nature of nineteenth century Brazil. As Schwarz says, "if we take poverty, the status of the worker and the position of the mulatto in the connotations they now have in modern class society, Machado will seem to us to be a notable example of the self-made man, held back by none of the obstacles in his way. However, in their real contexts, these notions had a very different meaning" (79).

Schwarz goes on to discuss the position that *agregados*, workers, held in Brazilian society at that time, which did not conform to the commonly-held European proletarian model for laborers. Rather, Machado's family lived in the house with the proprietors of the estate, and

the lady of the house was his godmother. He himself was well-educated and lived a respectable life. However, Schwarz does point out that this shows how Machado's family lived under the protective cover of the owner class, a link that Machado broke when he went out on his own (80). The influence of his youth and his subsequent break with paternalism are evident in his works; according to Schwarz, the first phase of Machado's writing (up to the age of forty), contains a "curious mixture of personal ambition, patriotic merit and artistic mediocrity" and represents "a wide-ranging, varied and detailed transcription of the current attitudes of the time – within the limits imposed by the edifying intentions" (82). By the time Machado grew into his mature style, he had created "a mental universe which he now went on to laugh at" (Schwarz 82). And as we shall see, he was quite adept at this laughter.

The works to be analyzed in this study pertain to the second phase of Machado's writing, starting in 1881 with *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas*. In his book *The Deceptive Realism of Machado de Assis*, John Gledson illustrates the author's motivation:

It should not be forgotten that, in novels, stories and *crônicas*, Machado had acquired an intimate knowledge of his readers' reactions (and of their variation from person to person); he knows how to keep the attention alive, to change subject . . . (before the reader takes himself off and finds some amusement elsewhere). The result is a book which is enjoyable and, in a way that is not easy to describe, moving; but that enjoyment and emotion are also a part of Machado's plan and they may cloud the judgment. It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that he knew that they would and that the "leitor das minhas entranhas" (my dearest reader, my soul-mate) would make mistakes (*Deceptive Realism* 15).

His narrative voice is always present, at times directly addressing his reader, and always giving the impression that he is a few steps ahead. It is this forethought of a reader's reaction that makes his works so effective at outlining and portraying the inherently hypocritical nature of humanity in that he never forgets how his reader is likely to think and react to his words.

As a contrast, Afrânio Coutinho presents a somewhat morose perspective of Machado's writing in his work *A filosofia de Machado de Assis*:

Para ele os homens só são capazes de vícios, ambições, dissimulação, sentimentos contraditórios, perversidades, ingratidões, inconstância, e, na sua obra, assistimos à procissão de todos os vícios e defeitos morais, más qualidades e pecados, que inteiramente dominam os homens na vida individual e social. Há sempre uma causa secreta, que é preciso pesquisar, nos atos humanos, e esse é um trabalho constante do romancista (25).

It is clear that the Machado portrayed here is firmly rooted in the ideas of Realism of showing life as it is with all its "perversions" and "vices"; gone are any beautified, Romantic personifications and what is left is human nature in its many and complex forms, good fodder for a writer wishing to critique society.

Virtually every scholar of Machado and his work comments on this critique. Ivan Teixeira sums up this characteristic of Machado's style by saying: "o [seu] método . . . consiste em interpretar a condição humana a partir da observação das pessoas do próprio tempo. Soube, como nenhum outro artista brasileiro, extrair das coisas mínimas de seu tempo conclusões máximas sobre a humanidade, sem deixar de fornecer uma visão específica da sociedade em que viveu" (1). I will use this idea, that Machado wrote of the society he observed and from there discussed humanity in general, as the foundation of the analyses to be presented in this study.

Mark Twain's life span was almost identical to Machado's. Samuel Clemens was born in 1835, and died in 1910. Unlike Machado, who rarely strayed far from his native Rio de Janeiro, Twain was a world traveler, whose journeys can be experienced in such works as *Innocents Abroad* (1869) and *Following the Equator* (1897). As a young man he worked as a printer's apprentice and later on the Mississippi first as an apprentice and later as a riverboat pilot, finally moving out West early on in the Civil War. The influence of the war is important in Twain's writing, although in a rather indirect way, and will be discussed in chapter three.

Professor of Modern American Literature Peter Messent discusses Twain's place in American society, identifying him as an "iconic figure in the American popular imagination" (11). However, there is an inherent contradiction to Twain's style: "he conducted an ongoing – if often disguised – quarrel with his country and its dominant value-system. And conflicts over territory, definitions of national and regional identity, the use of (and various types of) violence, and the intersection of such violence with issues of race and gender . . . are issues he recurrently explored" (Messent 11). Messent argues that the way in which Twain chose to represent the foibles of his society was to do so rather obliquely, likely with good reason: "as a humorist who depended on the allegiance of a popular audience, he knew that any contentious social concerns were best approached in an indirect way, masked by the comedy expected of him" (16). Part of this attempt to conceal the true victim, human or otherwise, of Twain's criticism is seen in the fact that many of his most famous works, particularly his novels, are not set in a contemporary setting – *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *Huckleberry Finn* (1884) take place in the time of Twain's youth, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889) in the sixth century, and "The Mysterious Stranger" in 1590.

English professor James M. Cox fits a discussion of Twain's style within the larger context of Realism: "[Twain's] humor arises from the act of exploiting the discrepancy between futile illusion – not merely his own, but those of society and history – and 'reality.' The humorist's creative role lay in inventing a 'reality' which would define the inadequacy of the given traditions, clichés, and illusions" (12). As we saw with Machado, Twain will also be taking a closer look at society in order to be able to laugh at, pass judgment on, and perhaps even affect some sort of change in it.

Stylistically, Twain introduced a new technique, which would become a focal point of his literature. As William Dean Howells writes, "Mr. Clemens is the first writer to use in extended writing the fashion we all use in thinking, and to set down the thing that comes into his mind without fear or favor of the thing that went before or the thing that may be about to follow" (392). In other words, he utilizes vernacular speech, capturing his world at a very local level. This will be particularly evident in works narrated in the first person, such as the uneducated words of Huckleberry Finn or the mind of the middle-class worker Hank Morgan.

This assumption of voice can also be seen in his own life, when, in order to accompany a group on a trip to the Holy Lands, he passed himself off as the Reverend Mark Twain, a "clergyman of some distinction" (Fulton 1). Joe B. Fulton describes this as being a "*literary* practical joke . . . and not just a personal one. Twain used the cruise to create the occasion for parody and burlesque" (2). This parody shows itself in the letters and journals he wrote while traveling, which, although using the same form as similar writings done by more serious pilgrims, are themselves very tongue-in-cheek. Fulton references ideas put forth by Bakhtin, saying that "a writer must 're-create the parodied language as an authentic whole, giving it its due as a language possessing its own internal logic'" and concludes by stating that "Twain's



texts parody the original text *and* constantly respond to it, both implicitly and explicitly” (3). We shall see this idea, of using a particular style in order to subvert it, in other texts in this present study.

Both Machado and Twain were very well-read, particularly in the area of European literature. Ron Powers, in his biography *Mark Twain: A Life*, lists some of the authors of whom Twain was fond, including Tennyson, Milton, Shakespeare, Swift, and Sterne (264). Although both Twain and Machado likely read many of the same writers, the influence of one in particular, Irish novelist and clergyman Laurence Sterne (1713-1768), can be seen in both. The *Encyclopedia of World Biography* describes Sterne as “one of the major novelists of the 18th century because of his experiments with the structure and organization of the novel” (“Laurence Sterne”). Machado and Twain were also experimenters with form, in particular regarding parodies of traditional styles.

Helen Caldwell discusses Sterne’s influence over Machado’s novel *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas* at length in her book *Machado de Assis: The Brazilian Master and His Novels*. She states how the preface of Machado’s novel specifically references Sterne, stating “Trata-se . . . de uma obra difusa, na qual eu . . . se adotei a forma livre de um *Sterne*” (Machado, *Memórias póstumas* 16). Caldwell goes on to comment, “When Braz states that has adopted ‘the free form of a Sterne,’ he is . . . referencing not so much Shandy’s superficial mannerisms as to basic manners of general structure, character portrayal, and narrative method” (75). The Sterne novel specifically referenced is *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1760-1767), which parodies the biographical novel by starting the narration with the title character’s conception rather than his birth. Machado puts his own spin on this idea by starting his work with Cubas’s

death. The “manners of structure” referred to by Caldwell are such elements as a fragmented narrative, peppered with digressions and retrogressions (Caldwell 76).

Twain also shows signs of Sterne’s influence, notably by Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey* (1768), which is a new take on the idea of a travel narrative, and more specifically, those narratives written by people making such religious pilgrimages, with their particular love of unnecessarily flowery language. According to Bruce Michelson, Twain’s travelogue *The Innocents Abroad* was “the most heterodox Anglo-American document in the [travel] genre since Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey*” (42). “Heterodox” in that rather than simply recounting the facts of the journey, Sterne’s narrator allows his own sentiments to come through in the story: “a comic novel that defies conventional expectations of a travel book” (“Laurence Sterne”). So too is *The Innocents Abroad* of a different nature, seemingly faithful to a traditional travelogue, but always with Twain’s wit just below the surface. For instance, when the group was in Egypt, Twain describes the donkeys they rode to reach their destination as being “the best we had found anywhere, and the most recherché. I do not know what ‘recherché’ is, but that is what these donkeys were anyhow” (*The Innocents Abroad* 473). Additionally, in a letter Twain wrote to William H. Clagett, dated 28 February 1862, he mentions the line “Yet we will be merciful, and temper the wind to the shorn lamb” (Twain, *Papers* 165), which the editor of the anthology identifies as an allusion to a line from *A Sentimental Journey*, saying it was “Sterne’s version of a French proverb” (Twain, *Papers* 168). Even in his casual correspondence one can see how this Irishman’s work affected Twain’s writing.

## **Humor – Studies and Key Terms**

Humor as a field of study must be treated seriously in order to fully appreciate its effect on the reading or listening public. As scholar Edward Gordon states, “Humor . . . is an intellectual exercise: the catching of those surprising incongruities in man’s actions” (128). The reasons why an author may choose such a device in order to criticize the world around him are many and varied, ranging from merely wishing to amuse his audience to hoping in some way to destroy his foes.

Historically, discussions of the purpose of using humor have deep roots. In his work *Laughing Matter: An Essay on the Comic*, Marcel Gutwirth quotes an earlier study:

A spirited passage by Harvey Mindess in *Laughter and Liberation* returns us to our starting point by setting on Aristotle’s proud claim of our uniqueness as laughing species the seal of tongue-in-cheek approval: “It is not by accident that man is the only animal who has a sense of humor. He is also the only animal who wears clothing, denies himself sex, worships non-existent deities, starves in order to create, kills and dies for his country, slaves and cheats for his bank balance.

Clearly he is the only animal who *needs* a sense of humor” (18).

The mere fact of being the only animal capable of the kind of rational thought that produces such concepts as war, religion, or finances in turn leads to a necessity to find ways to relieve the stress that such things bring to our daily life, as well as the possible violent repercussions of such acts.

In his article “What’s Happened to Humor?” Edward Gordon makes a statement which is fundamental to my analyses of both Machado de Assis and Mark Twain regarding their respective societies: “the true comic spirit is that which gives rise to the ‘thoughtful laughter’ of common sense. Comedy, in the nineteenth century, aimed at making us think” (128). In other

words, by making ridiculous some social flaw, the author brought it to light, and often the result was that the flaw modified itself. The idea that people need to have things which are deemed to be “common sense” pointed out to them is in and of itself rather paradoxical; after all, if it is something that should be commonly thought, why should it need to be exemplified in some way? This is not to say that an author was unsuccessful if he failed to bring about some sort of change, but at the very least his work would cause his readers to look at themselves and at their acts more critically.

Paul Lewis, in his book *Comic Effects*, discusses the social component of humor. As he states, “Sociological studies have shown that, because it expresses shared values, humor can be a social lubricant and a tool or force in the exercise of power in social groups” (Lewis 36). He also refers to past studies, describing humor both as being used as a kind of “social reprimand, reinforcing accepted notions of what is proper or normal,” as well as “a movement from an old social order to a new one” (Lewis 33). A final point from this scholar regards an overall definition of the use of humor: “humor marks the boundaries of our sense of the real, reveals our values, solidifies our social and psychological identities, supports our maturation and enables us to learn – serving as a weapon, an embrace, an evasion, a lesson, a puzzle and a game” (Lewis 156). The important point here is that regardless of its ultimate motive, humor is first and foremost a way for people to interact and to establish what the parameters of their society are or should be.

George Meredith, as discussed by Wylie Sypher, comments on this social element to humor as well, adding the primary use or characteristic of humorous writing as already stated by Gordon:

Comedy teaches us to look at life exactly as it *is*, undulled by scientific theories. Comedy banishes “monstrous monotonousness.” It teaches us to be responsive, to be honest, to interrogate ourselves and correct our pretentiousness. So the comic spirit is “born of our united social intelligence,” which shows us “our individual countenances,” and thus keeps us alive (ix).

This “correction of pretentiousness” is precisely the aim of Machado and Twain, as we shall see in the chapters to follow.

In a more intense vein, the desire to cause laughter is a defense mechanism against the things that most frighten us. Carlos Brück, in his work *Acerca del humor*, transcribes an interview with Argentine writer and journalist Geno Díaz, in which the latter talks about the cathartic nature of laughter. As Díaz says, “es como un colchón que me ayuda a parar los golpes, que me permite inclusive dar vuelta las situaciones más angustiosas, más tétricas o dolorosas. Darlas vuelta del revés y mostrarlas por el lado ridículo, para poder soportarlas” (Brück 17). He continues, stating that “Así es que el humor le sirve a cada uno como defensa. Pero también creo que el humor es didáctico en tanto que le enseña a la gente a ser más humilde, más prójima. Termina por acostumbrarte a reírte de vos mismo, de tu pequeñez, de tu soberbia. A partir de allí empezás a ser más humilde y a no tomarte tan en serio” (Brück 17-8).

Twain would certainly concur with this idea, as seen in the quote above and in the lines from the text which precede it: “Will a day come when the race will detect the funniness of these juvenilities and laugh at them – and by laughing at them destroy them? For your race, in its poverty, has unquestionably one really effective weapon – laughter” (“The Mysterious Stanger” 90-1). By merely making something ridiculous, we can cause it to lose its power over us, and in turn learn not to take things so seriously.

Along with this reassertion of power is the idea that this combination of laughter and sorrow gives a certain balance to the world and to ourselves. Machado de Assis, in his novel *Quincas Borba*, discusses this balance: “E enquanto uma chora, outra ri; é a lei do mundo, meu rico senhor; é a perfeição universal. Tudo chorando seria monótono, tudo rindo, cansativo; mas uma boa distribuição de lágrimas e polcas, soluços e sarabandas, acaba por trazer à alma do mundo a variedade necessária, e faz-se o equilíbrio da vida” (85-6). Again we see how laughter can counteract tears, although ultimately both ends of the spectrum will always be present in life.

Trying to determine an exact definition of humor, of what might be considered “humorous” or “funny,” is rather like trying to herd cats – you get one pinned down and another one pops up or runs off. After all, the instances that make an individual laugh are highly subjective, and what to one person may be “funny” may to another be dull, uninspired, annoying, or even offensive. Rather than focusing primarily on humor as a means of eliciting a particular physiological reaction, this dissertation will instead seek to discuss how the various stylistic forms of humor in writing are employed by the two authors as a venue for criticizing their respective societies. I will now define certain terms that will be employed throughout the rest of this paper.

The first idea to be discussed comes from very old literary traditions – “comedy.” According to M. H. Abrams’ *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (which will serve as a basis for most of the definitions in this section):

a comedy is a fictional work in which the materials are selected and managed primarily in order to interest and amuse us: the characters and their discomfitures engage our pleasurable attention rather than our profound concern, we are made to feel confident that no great disaster will occur, and usually the action turns out happily for the chief characters (38).

The basic purpose of this genre is, as stated, entertainment. Many authors will engage in fun wordplay to this end. For instance, in his novel *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas*, Machado de Assis has one chapter entitled “Inutilidade,” which states in its entirety, “Mas, ou muito me engano, ou acabo de escrever um capítulo inútil” (158). Twain, also a great hand at one-liners and short quips, once remarked, “Cold! If the thermometer had been an inch longer we’d all have frozen to death!” (Ayres 45). Naturally one could read more into these lines, perhaps speculating a critique on Machado’s part of the ineffectiveness of writing, or one on Twain’s part on the poor climate of the particular area he was visiting at the time, but the immediate reaction to these words is one of amusement.

Going from the general to the specific, within the concept of “comedy” one finds the sub-category “satiric comedy.” This variant, found in such early writers as Aristophanes (c.450-c.385 B.C.), has a particular set of characteristics, which, as will be discussed in greater detail in later chapters, applies aptly to the two major authors of this paper. Satiric comedy, as it is defined, “ridicules political policies or philosophical doctrines, or else attacks deviations from the social order by making ridiculous the violators of its standards of morals or manners” (Abrams 39). In other words, writers employing this literary technique seek to take the wind out of the sails of those who put on airs, who elevate their own importance within a group. The idea of attacking “deviations” will be relevant in this study in the chapters regarding vanity and religion, which will address in part the tendency to embrace whatever new fad appears on the horizon.

The term “satire” itself, while containing the basic definition given above, has a slightly different aim than “comedy”: “It differs from the *comic* in that comedy evokes laughter mainly as an end in itself, while satire derides; that is, it uses laughter as a weapon, and against a butt

that exists outside the work itself” (Abrams 275). Mark Twain once took a rather frustrating trip by train, where conditions caused them to have to stop time and again to fix the engine or clear the track. Later, when he arrived at the venue where he was to speak, he described the scene to his audience:

It was one of those trains that gets tired every seven minutes, and has to stop and rest for three-quarters of an hour. One of the passengers advised the conductor to take the cowcatcher off the front end and put it on the rear, because at the rate we were going we were not going to catch any cows, but there wasn’t anything to prevent them from climbing aboard on the rear end (“Mark Twain Tonight”).

The “butt” of the satire here is the rail system as it was in the nineteenth century, and the “weapon” is in Twain’s sarcasm in relating his experience to others who might also have need to make use of this form of conveyance.

A more specific example of satire is the “indirect satire,” which does not directly address its reader: “the most common indirect form is that of a fictional narrative, in which the objects of the satire are characters who make themselves and their opinions ridiculous or obnoxious by what they think, say, and do, and are sometimes made even more ridiculous by the author’s comments and narrative style” (Abrams 277). Within this category one finds “Menippean satire,” a term deriving from the philosopher Menippus of Ancient Greece. In simple terms, this particular genre can be described as being “written in prose . . . and constitu[ting] a miscellaneous form often held together by a loosely constructed narrative” (Abrams 277). The characters pontificate rather than speak, thus making whatever points they are espousing appear that much more ridiculous.



Machado's novel *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas* has been discussed at length as fitting under this heading in the work *O calundu e a panacéia: Machado de Assis, a sátira menipéia e a tradição luciânica* by Enylton de Sá Rego. This critical work summarizes the characteristics of Menippean satire thusly:

1) a ausência de distanciamento enobecedor dos personagens e de suas ações; 2) a mistura do sério e do cômico; 3) a absoluta liberdade do texto em relação aos ditames da verossimilhança; 4) a frequência da representação literária de estados psíquicos aberrantes; e finalmente 5) o uso constante de gêneros intercalados (Sá Rego 17).

I would add to this list the use of a fragmentary style of narrative, as already demonstrated in the chapter "Inutilidade."

We can see examples of Menippean satire in various parts of the *Brás Cubas* novel. The fact that the story is narrated by a deceased man fits in well with the third criteria – a posthumous narrator certainly goes against any usual idea of verisimilitude. There is also a definite mixture of the serious and the comic. Some chapters are very light and tongue-in-cheek, such as "Inutilidade," while others are much grimmer, such as the one entitled "Epitáfio" which is simply the epitaph on the gravestone of the protagonist's young fiancée.

Another important term is that of "irony," which entails the act of "dissembling or hiding what is actually the case; not, however, in order to deceive, but to achieve special rhetorical or artistic effects" (Abrams 135). One means of achieving this end is in the employ of a "naïve hero," who has the distinction of possessing an "invincible simplicity or obtuseness [which] leads him to persist in putting an interpretation on affairs which the knowing reader . . . just as persistently is called on to alter and correct" (Abrams 135-6). One example of this is the young

boy who tells his story in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. As we shall see in subsequent analyses, this character remains ingenuous throughout the narrative, only slowly coming to terms with what to him seem like impossible ideas, but which to audiences (at least modern audiences) are quite logical, such as the humanity of slaves.

Both authors were masters at one particular tool in their discourse – that of “parody.” As already noted with the Reverend Mark Twain, this device “imitates the serious manner and characteristic features of a particular literary work, or the distinctive style of a particular author, or the typical stylistic and other features of a serious literary genre, and deflates the original by applying the imitation to a lowly or comically inappropriate subject” (Abrams 26). It is a variant of “burlesque” which is defined as imitating “the manner . . . of a serious literary work or a literary *genre* . . . but makes the imitation amusing by a ridiculous disparity between the manner and the matter” (Abrams 26).

Both Machado and Twain seemed to be particularly drawn to parody involving sacred themes. This idea forms the basis of chapter four, but we can look at some examples now. In the Book of Matthew in the Bible, Jesus states that “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (*The Holy Bible*, Matt. 4.4). In *Esau e Jacó* (1904), Machado makes the following statement, inverting its Biblical counterpart: “Não só de fé vive o homem, mas também de pão e seus compostos e similares” (141). One of his short stories, “Na arca” (1878) mimics the format of the Bible, complete with chapters and verses, but sets out to re-tell what happened on the Ark. Twain was also interested in parodying religious beliefs. He wrote a number of “diaries” whose narrators were Biblical figures, such as Adam, Eve, Noah, Methuselah, and even Satan. In “Passages from Methuselah’s Diary” (1873, 1877), we see an inversion of a common marker in the Old Testament – that of listing the lineage of the

important figures. In Twain's text: "Came certain of the family to me praying that I would marry, so that heirs fail not. I am but young to take upon me such cares, albeit I am minded that my father Enoch, my grandfather Jared, my great-grandfather Mahalaleel, and my great-great-grandfather Cainan did each and all take wives at an age to like to that which I am now arrived at (Twain, "Methuselah's Diary" 97). Twain also pokes fun at the extreme longevity of these figures, as prior to the cited passage Methuselah states that it is his sixtieth birthday, and yet he feels too young to marry.

Another element to take into consideration when looking at humorous language is that of "wit," which is an element related to the author's use of intellect in humor: "Wit . . . denotes a kind of verbal expression which is brief, deft, and intentionally contrived to produce a shock of comic surprise" (Abrams 330). The comic device of "one-liners" would fit in here, where a comedian seeks to catch his audience off-guard with a short, pithy statement that appears at first to be headed in one direction, but then makes a sudden detour.

For instance, again in *Memórias póstumas*, Machado has his narrator describe his relationship with Marcela in these words: "Marcela amou-me durante quinze meses e onze contos de réis" (44). This juxtaposition of time and money with what is seemingly an amorous remark shows the real motivation behind Marcela's affection in a way that catches the reader off-guard.

In *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, Twain uses his skill at wordplay when he describes the scene in which his protagonist first meets his greatest ally in Camelot, a pageboy named Clarence: "He arrived, looked me over with a smiling and impudent curiosity; said he had come for me, and informed me that he was a page. 'Go 'long,' I said; you ain't more than a paragraph'" (10).

Within this general treatment of language, one also finds the concept of “paradox,” a term which will be employed frequently in the analysis of both Machado’s and Twain’s literary styles. This term refers to “a statement which seems on its face to be logically contradictory or absurd, yet turns out to be interpretable in a way that makes good sense . . . Paradox is also a frequent component in verbal *wit*” (Abrams 201). A main component of paradox is the idea of “oxymoron,” which refers to two seemingly opposite ideas being used together (Abrams 201). In *Esau e Jacó* we see an example of this in chapter five, which contains a lengthy explanation as to why lengthy explanations are unnecessary. The narrator ends by saying, “Quando muito, explico-as, com a condição de que tal costume não pegue. Explicações comem tempo e papel, demoram a ação e acabam por enfadar” (Machado, *Esau e Jacó* 24). Twain has a similar example in his novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, where, when discussing the nefarious actions of a couple of swindlers, Huck describes their attempts at getting money: “First they done a lecture on temperance; but they didn’t make enough for them both to get drunk on” (405).

Finally, as reflected in the title of this study, an important idea to consider is that of “cynicism.” The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a cynic as “one who shows a disposition to disbelieve in the sincerity or goodness of human motives and actions, and is wont to express this by sneers and sarcasms” (“Cynic”). This theme is very prominent in the writings of both Machado and Twain, and will be the central theme in chapter two.

These literary terms shall serve as the basis for the discussions in the subsequent chapters. The only other concept that I wish to define at this time, as it will be fundamental for the work as a whole, is that of “hypocrisy.” This concept is in its essence “a pretense of having a virtuous character, moral or religious beliefs or principles, etc., that one does not really possess” (“Hypocrisy”). We shall see this in particular in chapter five in the discussion of religion and

religious practices. Additionally, “hypocrisy” is “a pretense of having some desirable or publicly approved attitude” (“Hypocrisy”), which, although particularly analyzed in chapter two, will be a recurring theme throughout this entire study.

### **Period - Literary and Historical Influences**

Before looking at an analysis of each author’s individual style, let us consider the time period in which they wrote, as it will have a marked influence on their work, and also serve as a means of comparison and connection between the two. The primary literary time period to which both of these authors belong is that of Realism, which began roughly in the early 1880s (each also were influenced by and contributed to the period of Romanticism, but this study will focus on their later works). While each society necessarily had its own distinct characteristics, influenced by the culture of the people and the history of the nation, there were also many factors in common. Since both Brazil and the United States looked primarily to Europe for cultural inspiration, the sequence of literary periods was essentially the same. This age is marked more than anything else by the desire on behalf of the writers to portray society in a more accurate, lifelike, and therefore more “realistic” way. This in turn had a direct effect on the way in which humorous writing was employed.

Humor, as previously mentioned, is a common stylistic tool in literature, with a long history and many variants. There has been much study done as to why an author would choose to include humoristic elements in his work, and what reactions he aims to solicit from his readers. As Andrew Stott posits, “[W]hat purpose does [comedy] serve, and what, if anything, is its social function or philosophical value, apart from giving pleasure?” (5). As we have seen, critics argue for humor’s use in teaching its audience, particularly regarding social conventions,

as well as its cathartic properties in relieving stress or allaying fears. In any case, the main point is that the use of humor is much more complicated than merely “giving pleasure” to its audience.

We have already seen Aristotle’s mention of the importance of humor for human beings, and to answer his own question, Stott also delves into classical sources, looking for the roots of humor in today’s world. He states that as early as the 4<sup>th</sup> century, comedy was being used for much the same purpose as in modern times: “Donatus declared comedy to be essentially didactic, mirroring everyday life and schooling us in practical ethics” (Stott 5-6). This usage will be particularly relevant, as the idea of educating the reader is very prevalent for the time period studied.

If one looks at literary history, one will see that a marker in common for the beginning of most new periods is a reaction against the previous tradition. This is also the case here, with authors wishing to cast off the style popular among their Romantic predecessors. Romanticism had as its main traits the employment of nostalgia for a simpler past, fantasy, patriotism, the exaltation of nature, and the importance of emotions. These general characteristics would therefore not be employed, at least not in the same manner, by Realist authors. In the introduction to her book *The Social Construction of American Realism*, Amy Kaplan sums up the intent of Realism thusly: “Realistic narratives enact this search [for reality] not by fleeing into the imagination or into nostalgia for a lost past but by actively constructing the coherent social world they represent” (9). Rather than an idealized look at history, writers would portray scenes in a way that showed all of the inherent problems and contradictions of society.

One such example, which is in fact a direct lampoon of popular Romantic works such as Sir Walter Scott’s *Ivanhoe* (1819), is Mark Twain’s novel *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*. Hank Morgan, the narrator of the story, is a nineteenth century middle-class

worker who suddenly finds himself transported to the sixth century world of Camelot. However, rather than the typical tales of chivalry one normally associates with this period, Twain presents a very different portrait of the lords and ladies of Medieval England. When discussing the sort of language they were inclined to use, Morgan states that it was in fact rather inappropriate, not at all the courtly manners presented by the Romantics: “Indelicacy is too mild a term to convey the idea . . . Suppose Sir Walter, instead of putting the conversation into the mouths of his characters, had allowed the characters to speak for themselves? We should have had talk from Rachel and Ivanhoe and the soft lady Rowena which would embarrass a tramp in our day” (20). Twain’s commentary is clear – he is of the opinion that Scott did not portray his characters in a way which was true to reality. This is not to say that Twain was never influenced by such Romantic authors; in fact, some had been favorites of his in his youth; however, Twain’s own maturation as a writer had taken him farther from their idyllic depictions of life: “This is in the nature of things, as the grown-up man is inclined to let the heroes of his youth pay for the absorbing idolatry they evoked from the child. And that Scott and Cooper were the idols of the boy Sam Clemens, there is not the slightest doubt” (Liljegren 35).

Machado also pokes fun at the Romantics in his novel *Dom Casmurro*. In this case, Bento is describing watching a young man going off to woo his intended:

Montava um belo cavalo alazão, firme na sela, rédea na mão esquerda, a direita à cinta, botas de verniz, figura e postura esbeltas . . . Era uso do tempo namorar a cavalo. Relê Alencar . . . Relê Álvares de Azevedo . . . [P]ara ver a namorada no Catete, alugara um cavalo por três mil-réis . . . Três mil-réis! tudo se perde na noite dos tempos! (152).

One can clearly see Machado's opinion of the fact of spending such a large sum to rent a horse merely because the custom was to ride when one goes courting.

In addition to the period in literary history to which Machado and Twain belong, one must also look at the influence of the many changes that were taking place in society in general in the mid-late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Few historical epochs can rival this era in terms of rapid progress, both culturally and technologically. The entire world saw great changes during the time designated the *Belle Époque*, which ranges approximately 1871-1913 in Europe, and lasting in Brazil until that country's entrance into WWI in 1917. A rise in the importance placed on reason and science is one of the primary markers of this period, a fact which in turn will greatly influence the writers of this study.

Contributing factors to this rise in science include the Industrial Revolution, which began in Europe in the 1700s, and became of particular importance in Brazil and the United States in the mid-1800s. This fact had many outcomes which directly affected literary output. As Stephen Leacock in his book *Humor: Its Theory and Technique* discusses, the late 1800s saw many technological advances that facilitated the spread of humor and satire; most notably the more sophisticated printing methods and the growing access to education, leading to a more well-read public. As Leacock states, "In the mere matter of verbal form the nineteenth century, with its diffused printing and its widening education, was able to run riot" (14). This led to an increased importance of the working classes, as well as a rise in the influence of the bourgeois level of society. This was particularly evident in Brazil: "Já na segunda metade do século XIX, a burguesia tinha substituído a aristocracia no poder" (Faraco 157). The histories of the two countries of this study do differ a bit in this period, given their very different political make-ups. Let us first look at Brazil in the mid-late nineteenth century and early twentieth.



In 1822, Pedro I began his rule as the first emperor of Brazil following independence from Portugal. He reigned until 1831, when he returned to Europe, leaving his son Pedro II to take over. Pedro II would continue to rule Brazil until the declaration of the Republic in 1889. This epoch was one of great political and social change, which led to a growing sense of paradox among Brazil's citizens. The primary conflict rested in the fact that although Brazil was trying to make itself a "modern" society, the fact remained that it was still dependent on slave labor (Brazil would be the last nation in the West to abolish slavery, in 1888) and on its established agrarian institutions. As Elias Thomé Saliba discusses in his article "A dimensão cômica da vida privada na república":

[O] que significava *ser brasileiro* naquela realidade cada vez mais paradoxal, infinitivamente variada, regionalmente diversificada e, sobretudo depois [da abolição e a inauguração do regime republicano] uma realidade indefinida em termos do futuro? A sociabilidade individual, sufocada pelas estruturas escravistas, pela instabilidade populacional e econômica e pela incipiente urbanização . . . encontraria terreno para se desenvolver com as mudanças desencadeadas na transição para o período republicano? (290).

This climate of change and inconsistency will be reflected in the societal attitudes portrayed by Machado de Assis in the works to be analyzed in the following chapters.

This contrast between the old traditions and the emerging new societal ideals will be seen in the characters that Machado creates. Robert Moser comments on this in his work *The Carnavalesque Defunto*, speaking primarily of the protagonist of *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas* but applicable to other characters as well:

Nearly all Machado's bourgeois characters, to some degree, germinate from the disjointedness of this particular social milieu, but none more than Brás Cubas. A self-professed dilettante, Brás Cubas embraces the privileges bestowed on a slaveholding class accustomed to a maximum of social advancement with a minimum of actual effort expended. Consequently, he also embodies the moral pitfalls of an elite whose ideological bearings were determined by its desire for cultural ornamentation and social recognition (98).

As we shall see, these "pitfalls" will constitute a prime element of Machado's criticism and a ready target for his great wit.

In the United States we also see a century of great political and social change. Unlike Brazil, this country's political structure did not change, always being a democratic system. However, the American Civil War did threaten to divide the nation, ultimately resulting in the abolition of slavery as well as forever changing the face of American politics (this will be discussed further in chapter three). The country continued to move West, opening up new frontiers for its populace. The idea that America was somehow destined for greatness was a popular one, although traditional values still held sway, as is seen in much of the literature of that time. As John E. Bassett states in the introduction to his collection of essays entitled *A Heart of Ideality in My Realism*:

In part American writers were unable to step outside several frameworks of perception – an individualistic ethos, with diverse strands back through Emerson and common-sense philosophy and Franklin and the Reformation, and with its new accommodation to business progressivism; a nostalgic agrarian model of

virtue, supplemented by frontier publicity; and a notion of America's manifest specialness (3).

It is within this contrast of agrarian values versus progressive attitudes that Twain weaves his fictions.

Although certainly different on the surface in terms of societal make-up and politics, Brazil and the United States did share certain influences. In terms of the reigning philosophies of the time, we see a trend towards science, with the belief that all things can be explained logically. The concept of Positivism was introduced by Auguste Comte first in a series of texts published between 1830 and 1842, and then in a book released in 1865 ("August Comte"). The basic tenets of this philosophy are that all things can be explained rationally, with no need for recourse to faith or emotions – it was "designed to supersede theology and metaphysics and [depend] on a hierarchy of the sciences, beginning with mathematics and culminating in sociology" ("Positivism"). Comte's teachings would lead to serious questionings of current beliefs and practices, which in turn would create a literature of a much more critical nature, determined to show the foibles of society and the inherent hypocrisies of what institutions such as the Church were teaching.

Along a similar vein to Positivism is the philosophy of Determinism. Here, the idea is that everything has a rational cause: "In ethics, the view that human actions are entirely controlled by previous conditions, operating under laws of nature. Determinism is often understood as ruling out free will ("Determinism"). This attitude indicates a definite futility on the part of the human race, where everyone is essentially a victim to circumstances that are not under their own power. Again we see nature and science rather than emotions or faith used to explain daily life.

In a very general sense, this sort of doctrine, that all things are somehow inevitable, can be misused to validate personal gains at the expense of others. John Gledson makes a comment on Machado's take on Positivism and use of Determinism, and how it was employed in his writings:

[The] vital link between the principle and the practical application gives Machado's satire its philosophical substance, and an importance which extends beyond Positivism to those other systems so characteristic of the nineteenth century which envisaged the inevitable progress towards perfection of a single entity which subsumed the qualities of man and God . . . Machado shows how such theories inevitably lead to the justification of unpleasant means by the single, glorious end (*Deceptive Realism* 165).

A useful example of this is seen in the philosophical system created by Quincas Borba, *Humanitas*, with its battle cry "Ao vencedor as batatas" (Machado 19). These ideas will be discussed more fully in the following chapter.

This is not to say that religion is somehow being suppressed in the late nineteenth century. On the contrary, there are new religious philosophies coming into vogue during this period. Two of these are Spiritism (or Spiritualism), and Christian Science. Spiritualism began in the 1820s and 30s, and really found its voice during the 1860s. It holds as its teachings that "the spirits of the dead, surviving after the mortal life, can and do communicate with the living, [especially] through a person (a medium) particularly susceptible to their influence" ("Spiritualism"). Machado parodies this belief system in his *crônica* dated "5 de outubro de 1885," both in terms of what it teaches as well as in the fact that any idea coming from Europe would be embraced by the general public: "Eu, em geral, creio em tudo aquilo que na Europa é

acreditado. Será obcecação, mania, mas é assim mesmo, e já agora não mudo, nem que me rachem” (306). The narrator decides to attend a Spiritualist meeting, but appropriately only in spirit, an occurrence which would convince him of the validity of the doctrine. The main criticism one sees in this piece is the fact that the author views this new fad as simply that – the latest fashion in religion, yet another step along the road of human invention.

Moser also discusses the presence of this new religious fad, stating that “Machado undoubtedly stayed abreast of Spiritism’s growing popularity both inside and outside the academy. Evidently, Machado held Spiritists and Spiritist doctrine in low regard, judging by the numerous disparaging references he makes to the movement in his novels, chronicles, and short stories” (113-4) and that “[f]rom Machado’s perspective Spiritism was ushered in, along with other professedly enlightened European schools of thought, such as positivism and naturalism, as a substitute for Brazilian society’s colonial heritage of superstitions and backward mentality” (116). It is for these reasons that the treatment of Spiritism will be rather satirical, focusing on its ability to take hold of a people’s consciousness purely because it is the latest fad to come into vogue.

Hank Morgan in *Connecticut Yankee* also briefly ridicules Spiritualism, showing Twain’s opinion of the practices of this religious sect. Morgan has set out a challenge for Merlin, the reigning magician of the kingdom, confident in the latter’s inability and eventual humiliation. This end proves particularly likely as there is a large audience watching the magician work. As Morgan observes:

[Merlin] was a true magician of the time: which is to say, the big miracles . . . always had the luck to be performed when nobody but Merlin was present; . . . a crowd was as bad for a magician’s miracle in that day as it was for a spiritualist’s

miracle in mine: there was sure to be some skeptic on hand to turn up the gas at the crucial moment and spoil everything (*Connecticut Yankee* 119).

One can infer in this passage that Twain considered this religion to be mainly smoke and mirrors, lacking in any actual substance or ability.

The Church of Christian Science began in 1866, founded by Mary Baker Eddy, and emphasizes “healing through spiritual means as an important element of Christianity and teaching pure divine goodness as underlying the scientific reality of existence” (“Christian Science”). Twain’s criticism of this system is to such a degree that he has an entire work titled *Christian Science* (1907), which begins with the narrator, after becoming severely injured during a hike in the mountains outside Vienna, being treated by a woman who practices this doctrine. Through their dialogue one is made privy to the innermost “logic” of these beliefs, which, although the narrator struggles to follow and understand, ultimately shows just how illogical much of what this woman is saying really is.

The story begins with the narrator’s wait for the healer to arrive. This lady, unable to come that night, sends word that he must merely relax, and remember that there is nothing truly the matter with him (explained later by the fact that ideas such as “pain” do not truly exist). When he is told of this by the people of the house in which he is staying, he tries to make certain that they did in fact convey his message correctly:

“Why didn't you tell her I got hurt, too?"

"I did. I told her what you told me to tell her: that you were now but an incoherent series of compound fractures extending from your scalp-lock to your heels, and that the comminuted projections caused you to look like a hat-rack."

"And it was after this that she wished me to remember that there was nothing the matter with me?"

"Those were her words." (*Christian Science* 8)

One can see here the ridiculous nature, according to Twain, of Christian Science's faith-healing beliefs, and with it this author's low opinion of embracing new ideas simply because they are new, without giving thought to whether they are actually appropriate or beneficial. This particular point in history is rife with examples of this tendency towards fads, and both authors are experts at demonstrating this in their characters.

### **Goals for the Present Study**

Taking as a point of departure Edward Gordon's depiction of humor in the nineteenth century, that it "aimed at making us think," this study will seek to show examples from both Machado de Assis and Mark Twain in which they use their wit and wordplay in order to make observations about humanity in general and the society they saw around them. This will be done thematically in three chapters, with each representing a general theme that is further divided into subcategories.

The first body chapter will concern general portrayals of human vanity. Regarding this component of human nature, both Twain and Machado have quotations which show how pride and egotism are staples in an individual's makeup. Twain once said, "A man cannot be comfortable without his own approval" ("What is Man?" 30). This sentiment is echoed in Machado: "Eu não sou homem que recuse elogios. Amo-os; eles fazem bem à alma e até ao corpo. As melhores digestões da minha vida são as dos jantares em que sou brindado" ("Machado de Assis"). In both cases, the sentiments almost seem lofty and noble, but in reality

are ways of expressing how self-centered people can be. Within this general theme will be specific discussions on how people interact, in particular the way in which an individual portrays himself to others. Altruism as an impossible concept will be discussed, as well as the ever-changing nature of public opinion.

Chapter three is focused on the world of politics and politicians, as well as related topics. Twain has very little to say of politics in a positive light: “It could probably be shown by facts and figures that there is no distinctly American criminal class except Congress,” and “Suppose you were an idiot and suppose you were a member of Congress. But I repeat myself.” Similarly, in one chapter of *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas*, when the title character holds political office, we see how his job is largely useless – he spends much time arguing over pointless issues, such as the type of hat worn by soldiers. Other topics in this chapter include the significance of the emancipation of slavery during each author’s lifetime, the effects of war and patriotism, as well as the dangers of allowing oneself to become part of a mob.

The final body chapter regards religion and spirituality. Each author talks about the importance of religion within society, but comments on how it is frequently misinterpreted or abused. As Twain stated, “If man continues in the direction of enlightenment, his religious practice may, in the end, attain some semblance of human decency” (Ayers 196). Machado’s view: “Deus, para a felicidade do homem, inventou a fé e o amor. O Diabo, invejoso, fez o homem confundir fé com religião e amor com casamento” (*Frases*). In both statements we see how reason or social structure gets in the way of sentiment (or vice-versa). Themes to be considered include the frivolous way in which people regard their faith, the treatment of the Afterlife, and the portrayal of Biblical figures, such as Adam and Eve and the Devil.



The main idea that appears in every analysis, regardless of the specific area of study, is that of the inherently hypocritical nature of humanity. In other words, saying one thing and meaning another, or acting in a way that does not align with one's professed beliefs happens in the worlds of politics and religion, as well as in daily interactions. Machado and Twain were experts in using their writing to point out the foibles of their societies, as we shall discuss in the pages to come.

## CHAPTER 2: HUMAN VANITY – THE TRUE VILLAIN OF THE PIECE

*“A opinião é um velho óleo incorruptível.”*

*--Machado de Assis, Esaú e Jacó*

*“There are no grades of vanity, there are only grades of ability in concealing it.”*

*--Mark Twain, Notebook, 1898*

In his novel *Dom Casmurro*, Machado makes the following claim through his title character: “As pessoas valem o que vale a afeição da gente” (245). In other words, human comportment is primarily a social construct, and the way in which we behave is based in large part on what others think of us. At the same time, there is a definite need to please one’s own self, regardless of how it may affect another. In an essay entitled “The Character of Man” (1885), Twain makes the statement that: “The mainspring of man’s nature is just that – selfishness” (135). How then to marry these two seemingly opposite ideas – that of wishing for approval from society whilst putting one’s own self first – together? A possible answer lies in one concept – vanity, which makes humans want to both conform in order to fit in and yet still look out for only themselves.

John Gledson, in his essay “*Dom Casmurro*: Realism and Intentionalism Revisited,” stated that, “Machado, whether in short stories, in novels, or in *crônicas*, is a good deal less interested in ‘facts’ . . . than he is in attitudes and conventions” (9). We see this idea used to explain the dual nature of vanity in Machado’s short story “O espelho” (1882). Here, the man narrating the majority of the tale describes what happened when he was promoted to the military position of *alferes*. The praise and acclaim he received from his friends and family, as well as the entire community, led him to adopt airs of superiority that he did not previously possess. He attributes this to the fact that people are actually made up of two souls: “uma que olha de dentro para fora, outra que olha de fora para dentro” (Machado, “O espelho” 155). One soul is based on the person’s internal make-up, and the other is created by external influences. The two are constantly fighting for supremacy, and in this case, it is not until this man found himself alone, without admirers to boost his vanity, that his interior soul began to re-assert itself.

Ivan Teixeira in his book *Apresentação de Machado de Assis* aptly sums up this human dichotomy:

[Suas personagens] são arrastadas pelo que poderíamos chamar *o instinto do privilégio*, que é um refinamento do instinto de preservação, em virtude do qual a existência humana só ganha sentido na luta pela acumulação de vantagens. Mas o mais aflitivo é que tal luta se institucionaliza pela máscara das boas maneiras, cuja feição mais corriqueira é a hipocrisia, por via da qual se disciplinam a traição e a pilhagem (64-5).

Again we see the idea that actions will be the direct result of desire, creating an atmosphere of great paradox and hypocrisy, or, as Bento puts it, “a vaidade é um princípio de corrupção” (Machado, *Dom Casmurro* 192).

There are many ways in which Machado and Twain portray their criticism of the hypocrisy of the human race, and vanity is perhaps the most important. Both authors possessed what Afrânio Coutinho termed a “preocupação moralizante,” which he defines as an “intenção constante de definir o homem e suas relações na vida social” (32). These social relationships can be categorized in a number of ways, such as taking Twain’s idea of selfishness a step further to state that there is no such thing as a truly altruistic act. Other themes for consideration are the way in which public opinion influences actions, from keeping people from speaking their minds while alive to the way in which a group can change its mind regarding whether to love or condemn certain individuals. Lying as a fundamental element of social interaction will be considered, as will other aspects of human comportment, such as the tendency to embrace the latest fads.

Machado de Assis was a great observer of humanity and human behavior. As a primarily Realist writer, he took care in his narratives to portray the citizens of his Brazil, and in particular the upper class, as they were, with all their inconsistencies and hypocrisies at the forefront. As Teixeira describes it, “O autor reinventa [nas narrativas] aquilo que observava nas pessoas, procurando explorar, em profundidade, os componentes essenciais da ética, da moral e da psicologia. Cada texto possui o propósito definido de investigar um problema específico, pois, de caso em caso, Machado de Assis pretendia formar um conceito sobre o homem” (57). As mentioned in the introduction with the ideas of Maia Neto, this “concept” about people will have a philosophical nature, exploring the inherent value of social life and how it incorporates itself into human life in general.

Twain also was skilled at portraying the inherent hypocrisy of humanity. As critic David E. E. Sloane describes him, “His art and his thought both came from a humorous response to a world which *claimed* to be good and kind and humane but *acted* badly and sometimes evilly, cruelly, and inhumanely” (xiii). And later, “Twain created work after work out of the comic materials surrounding him, which he found abundant in the failure of the world to live up to its own image of itself” (Sloane xvi). It is this idea, of not living up to its own self-assigned potential, that will characterize most of the analyses here referring to works by Twain.

Human vanity is perhaps the greatest flaw observed by both Machado and Twain and it is here that they show their most artful displays of cynicism regarding humanity. It is responsible for much of the selfish and contradictory elements of people’s character, and therefore creates a fertile ground for ridicule. As Twain critic John Fulton notes, “Through his parody, Twain reveals the difference between what people say they believe and what they really believe” (4). Helen Caldwell, referring specifically to Machado’s work, takes this idea a step further by saying

that: “Life, as well as death, is given the comic treatment. The butt of the comedy is in all cases the same – human vanity” (85). In a similar vein, she goes on to make what seems to be a rather paradoxical statement: “Vanity is responsible for honesty; and it is honesty . . . that gives rise to dishonesty” (87). For instance, in *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas*, the title character finds a gold coin on the beach, and basks in the praise he receives when he turns it in to the police station – vanity responsible for honesty. Later, upon finding a much larger sum, he keeps it for himself, as he no longer needs to feel lauded, having already established himself as a good person – honesty responsible for dishonesty (*Memórias póstumas* 84). This dichotomy, taken a step farther, leads to the idea that there is no such thing as a truly selfless and altruistic act, as there will always be some hidden personal motive.

In its simplest terms, “altruism” refers to a concern for the welfare of others. In other words, it is “the philosophical doctrine that right action is that which produces the greatest benefit to others” (“Altruism”). A lofty ideal, indeed, but one which both Twain and Machado would contend does not actually pertain to human beings. Twain critic Patricia M. Mandia comments on this notion: “Twain agrees that supposedly altruistic acts are really performed for selfish reasons” (25). In his short story “What is Man?” (1906), this author presents a dialogue between a Young Man and an Old Man, in which they discuss the human race. The Old Man, showing the cynicism of a long life, states that there is only one motivating impulse for all human comportment: “The impulse to *content his own spirit* – the *necessity* of contenting his own spirit and winning its approval” (“What is Man” 27). The Young Man disagrees, saying that an unselfish man will do something for the good of another, to which the Old Man responds, “It is a mistake. The act must do *him* good, first; otherwise he will not do it. He may *think* he is doing it solely for the other person’s sake, but it is not so; he is contenting his own spirit first –

the other person's benefit has to always take *second* place" ("What is Man" 27). Any example put forth by the Young Man always comes back to this – that although an act may appear to be *selfless*, in actuality there is always an element of the *selfish* involved.

What may in fact be closer to the truth for most people can be found within a philosophy put forth by Machado's character Quincas Borba – that of *Humanitas*. In effect, this mindset gives justification to anything, provided that you yourself benefit in some way. This concept takes the idea of the inexistence of altruism and goes beyond that which Twain discussed in the preceding example. Here, not only are morally good acts questionable, but even acts that few would perceive as such become permissible. As John Gledson states, "*Humanitismo* is not only a convenient excuse for selfish actions, but also provides the believer with a comforting view of society and history . . . No wonder [it] is the [system of philosophy destined to destroy all others], for it is the perfect justification of selfishness" (*Deceptive Realism* 166).

Perhaps one of Quincas Borba's most extreme examples of this doctrine is seen in the scene in which he narrates the death of his grandmother. This woman had been crossing the street, when a fast-moving carriage suddenly appeared, running her over. When the man to whom he was telling this story noted that the situation was lamentable, Borba replied that it was no such thing: "O dono da sege estava no adro, e tinha fome, muita fome, porque era tarde, e almoçara cedo e pouco . . . A sege no meio do caminho achou um obstáculo e derribou-o; êsse obstáculo era minha avó. O primeiro ato dessa série de atos foi um movimento de conservação: Humanitas tinha fome" (Machado, *Quincas Borba* 16). This other man's hunger justified his killing an innocent woman in his rush to get to food, or as the old expression goes, the end justified the means. Caldwell is quick to point out though that this does not mean to say that the characters are to be regarded as villains: "Vanity begets ambition, which . . . is what stokes the

engine of human progress . . . The villain of the piece is not any of the personages. It is human nature, life itself” (86, 89).

In this same vein, although less dramatic, is a short scene from Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Here, Huck and Jim, the escaped slave, are making their way to freedom, but are in need of food. Relying on teachings learned from his Pap (a town drunk who never worked a day in his life), Huck decides that they can “borrow” certain items from the farms they pass: “Pap always said it warn’t no harm to borrow things if you was meaning to pay them back some time . . . [Jim and I decided] the best way would be for us to pick out two or three things . . . and say we wouldn’t borrow them anymore – then he reckoned it wouldn’t be no harm to borrow the others” (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 275). The solution was to decide to never “borrow” crabapples or persimmons, although we find an extra motivation: “I was glad the way it come out, too, because crabapples ain’t ever good, and the p’simmons wouldn’t be ripe for two or three months yet” (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 275). It is not difficult to make a sacrifice when there is not, in fact, any sacrifice needed.

Ideas like Borba’s *Humanitas* and Pap’s liberal stance on stealing may not go over well among most members of society as they are not conducive to the general mores that are considered acceptable. However, humanity can be quite fickle, and it is not uncommon for the opinions of the group to change at a moment’s notice.

This fickle nature of society appears in works of both authors, and one can approach this in a number of ways; for instance, in Machado there are many examples of the practice of remembering the dead as having been better than they were, while Twain’s works often demonstrate the swift reversal of fortune in terms of public opinion once new facts are presented.



The common thread here is that nothing is carved in stone, and memory can be changed just as easily as opinion when the situation calls for it.

One example of memory being manipulated to one's benefit is mentioned in the novel *Esau e Jacó*. Here the question centers around the importance of a speech:

O discurso é que ele não esqueceu, mas quem é que esquece os discursos que faz? Se são bons, a memória os grava em bronze; se ruins, deixam tal ou qual amargor que dura muito. O melhor dos remédios, no segundo caso, é supô-los excelentes, e, se a razão não aceita esta imaginação, consultar pessoas que a aceitam, e crer nelas (Machado, *Esau e Jacó* 79).

Whether a particular speech had in actuality any merit is irrelevant; all one has to do is believe that it did, or find people willing to say so, and the matter is settled.

This practice of selective memory is also applicable to more profound situations. Bento in the novel *Dom Casmurro* talks about his Aunt Justina, and her state of grieving for her late husband. If one did not know the facts of the case, one would assume that she had been quite fond of him: “em todo o caso, não existira homem capaz de competir com ele na afeição, no trabalho e na honestidade, nas maneiras e na agudeza de espírito” (*Dom Casmurro* 139).

However, this was not the case, as Bento continues: “Esta opinião . . . era póstuma, pois em vida andavam às brigas, e os últimos seis meses acabaram separados” (*Dom Casmurro* 139). Bento chalks this up to societal niceties, as “o louvor dos mortos é um modo de orar por eles” (*Dom Casmurro* 139). Therefore, although a bit hypocritical, there was no harm in this form of self-deceit.

There may also be extra hidden motivations behind praising the deceased, regardless of whether he deserved it. In *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas*, as the narrator is telling of his

funeral, he mentions the stirring eulogy given by a friend of his – the “sublime louvor ao nosso ilustre finado” (Machado 17). As Cubas fondly speaks of the friend who described him in such lovely terms, we see the whole story: “Bom e fiel amigo! Não, não me arrependo das vinte apólices que lhe deixei” (Machado, *Memórias póstumas* 17). It is very easy to sing the praises of someone from whom one has benefited financially.

In *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, Twain narrates a scene in which a man, Muff Potter, is wrongly accused of murder and the entire town reacts against him, almost to the extent of forming a lynching party. Later on, he is cleared of all charges, and the change in people’s attitude is remarkable: “As usual, the fickle, unreasoning world took Muff Potter to its bosom and fondled him as lavishly as it had abused him before” (*Tom Sawyer* 173). Again, hypocrisy, but not to be viewed in a malicious light: “that sort of conduct is to the world’s credit; therefore it is not well to find fault with it” (*Tom Sawyer* 173). In this case, the fickleness actually benefitted the recipient, so therefore was a case of no harm done.

Twain does not always portray such occurrences as innocent or harmless; rather, there is a more disastrous side to the masses being the ones to influence an individual’s fate. In “The Mysterious Stranger,” the character known as Satan (a never fully-identified omnipotent, omniscient observer of humanity) makes this observation:

I know your race. It is made up of sheep. It is governed by minorities, seldom or never by majorities. It suppresses its feelings and its beliefs and follows the handful that makes the most noise. Sometimes the noisy handful is right, sometimes wrong; but no matter, the crowd follows it. The vast majority of the race, whether savage or civilized, are secretly kind-hearted and shrink from

inflicting pain, but in the presence of the aggressive and pitiless minority they don't dare to assert themselves (Twain 81).

This idea of the devastating consequences of the many falling under the spell of the few, “mob mentality,” will be discussed further in the chapter on politics. The aim here is to point out the fleeting nature of human opinion, which can change quite quickly depending both on the circumstances as well as on what certain groups or segments of society may believe.

Embracing the latest idea does not always have to refer specifically to relationships among people. This period in history was a time of great advances, particularly in science and philosophy. Both Machado and Twain were on the front line, observing how their countrymen took first to one idea and then to another as new fads came in.

In Machado's short story “O Alienista” (1881) we see this author's skill at satiric comedy. Here we follow the narrative of a town that has been granted the privilege of building their own psychiatric asylum. Setting himself up as the head of it is Dr. Simão Bacamarte, a man who has given himself over entirely to the study of science: “A ciência, disse ele . . . é o meu único emprego” (Machado, “O Alienista” 38). Unfortunately for the doctor, and even more so for the residents of his city, his criteria for insanity were rather transitory and arbitrary. In the first round of commitments, the asylum became so full that they had to build an annex. We learn that a primary cause for the high patient rate is that the doctor labels as insane anyone who seems to obsess about *anything*, such as the man who, wishing to show off his wealth, decorates his house with the most expensive furnishings. Bacamarte sees the intensity that this man has towards his house, and decides to lock him up (this man is later released, as the doctor changes his stance on this particular definition of insanity).

Bacamarte is constantly re-evaluating his system for identifying the insane, at times persecuting those who seem too perfect, and at other times those who are not perfect enough. This former situation, the pursuit of perfection, ultimately leads to his own downfall. By the end of the story, Bacamarte has released everyone he once deemed unstable, for none of them seemed to possess the qualities that he now believes to be the true markers of insanity. The outcome of all this:

Simão Bacamarte achou em si os característicos do perfeito equilíbrio mental e moral; pareceu-lhe que possuía a sagacidade, a paciência, a perseverança, a tolerância, a veracidade, o vigor moral, a lealdade, todas as qualidades enfim que podem formar um acabado mentecapto . . . Era decisivo. Simão Bacamarte curvou a cabeça juntamente alegre e triste, e ainda mais alegre do que triste. Ato contínuo, recolheu-se à Casa Verde (Machado, “O Alienista” 80).

He is more happy than sad to confine himself, as he has seen his scientific methods play out.

This story, like the excerpt from *Tom Sawyer* to follow, is used as a criticism of the trends of the time; in this case, the over-importance of science in the way that it will not allow this man to be satisfied: “Não lhe bastava ter descoberto a teoria verdadeira da loucura; não o contentava ter estabelecido . . . o reinado da razão. *Plus ultra!* Não ficou alegre, ficou preocupado, cogitativo; alguma coisa lhe dizia que a teoria nova tinha, em si mesma, outra e novíssima teoria”

(Machado, “O Alienista” 79). Rather than being the source of all knowing, in this case we see that science merely added more confusion, ultimately leading this man to become a victim of his own scientific method.

An example of the embracing of new fads produced by science from Twain’s oeuvre comes in the novel *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Tom’s Aunt Polly, a plain, simple woman

from a middle-class background, is fond of trying out any new kind of patent medicine, much to the dismay of her young nephews. In Twain's description of this fascination, we can clearly see his criticism of this new trend in medicine:

She was one of those people who are infatuated with patent medicines and all new-fangled methods of producing health or mending it . . . When something fresh in this line came out she was in a fever . . . to try it; not on herself, for she was never ailing, but on anybody else that came handy. She was a subscriber for all the "Health" periodicals and phrenological frauds; and the solemn ignorance they were inflated with was breath to her nostrils. All the "rot" they contained about ventilation, and how to go to bed, and how to get up, and what to eat, and what to drink, and how much exercise to take, and what frame of mind to keep one's self in, and what sort of clothing to wear, was all gospel to her, and she never observed that her health-journals of the current month customarily upset everything they had recommended the month before (*Tom Sawyer* 75).

There are a few interesting points in this passage. First, it is worth noting that Aunt Polly never tried out any of these cure-alls on herself; perhaps on a subconscious level her faith in their effectiveness only went so far. Also, Twain uses very charged language when referring to these health magazines and the information they publish – "frauds," "ignorance," and "rot" – as well as the inherently contradictory nature of their advice, advocating one idea one month and then doing a complete reversal the next.

There are those who choose quite deliberately to ally themselves with whatever thought or philosophy is currently being embraced by the majority. One such example can be found in the short story "Teoria do medalhão" (1881) by Machado. This narrative shows a father giving

his son, newly turned twenty-one, advice on how best to take his place among society. In effect, the words he speaks are quite different from what one might consider to be the proper way to plan one's life and career, but in this way Machado points out a very real truth of people's ambitions – that rising as quickly as possible to the highest echelon of society in order to ensure stability is more important than any individual goals one might have.

This fatherly talk starts out innocently enough: “O meu desejo é que te faças grande e ilustre, ou pelo menos notável, que te levantes acima da obscuridade comum” (Machado, “Medalhão” 83). To that end, he recommends becoming a *medalhão*, a position he himself was unable to fill due to not having a father who gave him such good advice as he now gave his own son. At this point, only a few paragraphs into the story, we already can see the writing on the wall concerning what this man wants for his child. The Portuguese-language dictionary *Aurélio* has two definitions of *medalhão* that fit in this context. First, it is simply an “homem poderoso, figurão” (“Medalhão”). A suitably noble goal in and of itself; however, the second definition gives us a bit more insight into Machado's train of thought: “Indivíduo nulo, sem valor real, porém guindado a posições relevantes pelo dinheiro ou pela influência de boas amizades, jeitosamente conseguidas” (“Medalhão”). It is this way of life to which this father wishes his son to belong.

The principal characteristic of a *medalhão*, we learn, is essentially a lack of original or independent thought, a “perfeita inópia mental” (Machado, “Medalhão” 84). The best ways to achieve this state involve pursuing hobbies that do not tax one's mind in terms of useful thought. In other words, the best activities do not lead to one musing too long on questions of any real importance. Games like dominoes and whist are good, as you have to spend your time concentrating on your pieces or cards. Billiards is even better, as it can lead to important

contacts: “Se te aconselho excepcionalmente o bilhar é porque as estatísticas mais escrupulosas mostram que três quartas partes dos habituados do taco partilham as opiniões do mesmo taco” (Machado, “Medalhão” 83). We see here that finding people who think the same way you do is a crucial step to securing your place in society.

The father goes on to discuss other important practices to keep in mind in order to avoid accidental exposure to thought: “O passeio nas ruas, mormente nas de recreio e parada, é utilíssimo, com a condição de não andares desacompanhado, porque a solidão é oficina de idéias, e o espírito deixado a si mesmo, embora no meio da multidão, pode adquirir uma tal ou qual atividade” (Machado, “Medalhão” 84), similar to ideas seen in “O espelho.” One can also hang out in bookstores, but only for the social opportunities, never to buy books. The idea is to engage others in conversation, to find out what their opinions are, rather than making your own. As the father states, “75 por cento desses estimáveis cavalheiros repetir-te-ão as mesmas opiniões, e uma tal monotonia é grandemente saudável. Com este regime . . . reduces o intelecto, por mais pródigo que seja, à sobriedade, à disciplina, ao equilíbrio comum” (Machado, “Medalhão” 85).

The lessons here are summed up towards the end of the story, in which the son asks if he is allowed any sort of philosophy of life. His father responds, “Entendamo-nos: no papel e na língua, alguma, na realidade nada. ‘Filosofia da história’, por exemplo, é uma locução que debes empregar com freqüência, mas proíbo-te que chegues a outras conclusões que não sejam as já achadas por outros. Foge a tudo que possa cheirar a reflexão, originalidade, etc., etc.” (Machado, “Medalhão” 89). In other words, ally yourself with people of influence, and do not allow yourself any sort of independent thought as it will only cause trouble.

The last part of the speech here shows Machado's wit and how he artfully works himself into a piece. As a bit of parting advice, the father tells his son that above all, he must never use irony which is "esse movimento ao canto da boca, cheio de mistérios . . . feição própria dos céticos e desabusados" (Machado, "Medalhão" 89). Machado himself fits in with this group of "cynics and impudent people," and by putting these words into the mouth of this character, shows just how pompous and ridiculous the advice given in this story is.

Along similar lines is a statement regarding the working class versus the aristocracy in *Connecticut Yankee*. Here, like in "Medalhão," the ultimate goal should be to possess a vocation that pays well, but instead of trying to eliminate all forms of thought, in this case it is the more "intellectual" type of labor that should be sought. As Hank Morgan states:

There are wise people who talk ever so knowingly and complacently about 'the working classes,' and satisfy themselves that a day's hard intellectual work is very much harder than a day's manual toil, and is righteously entitled to much bigger pay. Why, they really think that, you know, because they know all about the one, but haven't tried the other (Twain, *Connecticut Yankee* 169).

Implied in this is the idea that these "intellectuals" do not truly earn the money they make, as their work is not as difficult or important. However, if one is fortunate or clever enough to take advantage of one's situation, one can live a relatively comfortable life.

In addition to his counsels against logic or opinion, one can also characterize the advice of the father from "Teoria do Medalhão" as the importance of deception, presenting oneself as other than one truly is. Both Machado and Twain considered the art of deception and lies to be a fundamental part of the human character. In his novel *Dom Casmurro*, Machado's title character comments that, "A mentira é muita vez tão involuntária como a transpiração" (91). Not only



does the telling of a lie come naturally, so does the willing acceptance of it, as seen in the statement commonly attributed to Twain, that “A lie can travel halfway around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes” (Ayres 139).

There is definitely a social component to the telling of falsehoods in both authors. Later on in *Dom Casmurro* the narrator equates certain lies with the line “a senhora saiu” when in reality she merely does not want company. As he states, “Há nessa cumplicidade um gosto particular; o pecado em comum iguala por instantes a condição das pessoas” (*Dom Casmurro* 103). In “The Mysterious Stranger,” Twain describes a seemingly virtuous woman thusly: “Like the rest of the village, she could tell every-day lies fast enough and without taking any precautions against fire and brimstone on their account” (31). In *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas*, the character Doutor B. sums up this internalization of mendacity within societal parameters in this way: “a veracidade absoluta era incompatível com um estado social adiantado e . . . a paz das cidades só se podia obter à custa de embaçadelas recíprocas” (Machado 118). The implication here is that not only are lies considered commonplace and in some instances even perfectly acceptable, they are in fact an integral element of human interaction, without which the fabric of society might fall apart.

We can see these ideas elaborated and explained in the study *The Varnished Truth* by David Nyberg. This work discusses the personal and social implications of deception, and fits in well with the statements put forth by Machado and Twain. As Nyberg states:

In an ordinary community of morally decent people there is a need for trust and community standards for truth telling, but an ordinary community, unlike the ideal scientific community, must continually face the ambiguous problem of when to tell how much of what truth to whom. Telling the whole truth about everything

to everybody all of the time is an impossibility, but even if it were possible, it probably wouldn't be desirable (10).

In other words, valued as honesty may be in theory, in practice it has its limits. Nyberg goes on to say: "Concealment, obliqueness, silence, outright lying – all help to hold Nemesis at bay; all help us abide too large helpings of reality . . . In civilization no less than in the wilderness, survival at the water hole does not favor the fully exposed and unguarded self. Deception, it seems, is a vital part of practical intelligence" (12). It is this practical application that we see alluded to earlier, used as a means of maintaining some degree of safety and sensibility in the social arena.

A strong connection between truth and lies does exist, at least according to Machado and Twain. These two dichotomous practices, on the surface seemingly polar opposites, are in fact linked, at times in a causal relationship. In *Memorial de Aires* (1908), the title character makes the following observation: "o acaso também é corregedor de mentiras. Um homem que começa mentindo disfarçadamente acaba muita vez exato e sincero" (Machado 41). The irony of this statement is in the fact that a person can start out with the intention of deceit, but end up telling the truth, however unintentionally.

In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, we see how the two principal characters are forced by their circumstances to lie to everyone they meet in order to conceal the fact that Jim is a runaway slave being helped to freedom by Huck. At one point in the narrative, the two find themselves unwillingly in the company of two charlatans who are posing as the relatives of a deceased man in order to swindle that man's daughter out of her inheritance. Huck, torn between not wishing to anger these men who threaten to expose Jim as a runaway and yet not wanting to

see the young girl be taken advantage of, has to make a difficult decision. After inadvertently letting part of the story of deception slip, he decides to reveal all, even though it seems unnatural:

I reckon a body that ups and tells the truth when he is in a tight place is taking considerable resks, though I ain't had no experience . . . and yet here's a case where I'm blest if it don't look to me like the truth is better and actually SAFER than a lie . . . Well, I says to myself at last, I'm going to chance it; I'll up and tell the truth this time, though it does seem most like setting down on a kag of powder and touching it off just to see where you'll go to (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 385-6).

The very idea of telling the truth seems so foreign and uncertain that Huck does not have any confidence in its ability to work; this stems from his own experience, in which the only way he can protect himself is by making up stories, whether to explain Jim's presence or to keep people from looking too closely at his own circumstances. He is constantly conscious of the fact that what he is doing is "wrong," at least according to the way he was raised. However, as Mandia points out, "Huck is impressed by society's values which appear to be good to him because the people in authority espouse them, but all the while the reader realizes that in reality Huck's own values, even though he is not confident in them, are far nobler" (35-6). This refers back to the idea of the "naïve hero" as previously discussed in the introductory chapter of this study.

One type of individual who does not need to concern himself with falsehood can be found in the writings of both authors. Machado and Twain both wrote pieces in which they discuss a particular shared belief – that of the liberty of speech enjoyed by a posthumous speaker. This individual is in a unique position – as he is no longer a functioning part of society,

and therefore not subject to its rules or social niceties, he can be completely frank and honest in his portrayal of people and in his stating of his own opinions.

The most prominent character who embraces this concept in the literature of Machado is Brás Cubas, as one can see in the title of his novel: *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas*. As the title implies, this narrative was composed after its author had passed away (“author” here referring of course to the fictional author rather than to Machado). In the Introduction “Ao leitor,” Cubas already makes clear the origin of the piece, calling it an “obra de finado” and stating that it was written “cá no outro mundo” (Machado, *Memórias póstumas* 16). The first chapter of the book is also indicative, entitled “Óbito do autor.” It is here that Cubas sets out the structure of his piece, discussing at length why he chose to write it as he did, beginning his autobiography with the narration of his death rather than his birth, a move that is a reference to but at the same time an inversion of Laurence Sterne’s novel *Tristram Shandy*, as discussed in the introductory chapter of this study.

The motivation behind this decision of textual order is twofold: “a primeira [consideração] é que eu não sou propriamente um autor defunto, mas um defunto autor . . . a segunda é que o escrito ficaria assim mais galante e mais novo” (Machado, *Memórias póstumas* 17). The key point here is the distinction made between an *autor defunto* and a *defunto autor*. In other words, rather than a narrative that was written in life, whose author has since expired, this story was written in death by an author who had *already* died. What this in turn means for the writer is that he is now completely free of any earthly limitations to his speech: “a franqueza é a primeira virtude de um defunto” (Machado, *Memórias póstumas* 55). Teixeira comments on this, saying “Os seus escritos formam um livro de fofocas póstumas, com uma grande diferença das fofocas dos vivos: à medida que difama os amigos e inimigos, acusa, aos risos, os seus

próprios defeitos (87).” Cubas is now free to gossip about anyone and everyone, including himself.

In a later chapter, Cubas spells out what exactly this liberty of *franqueza* means, and why it is so important in the formation of this work:

Na vida, o olhar da opinião, o contraste dos interesses, a luta das cobiças obrigam a gente a calar os trapos velhos, a disfarçar os rasgões e os remendos, a não estender ao mundo as revelações que faz à consciência . . . Mas, na morte, que diferença! que desabafo! que liberdade! . . . Porque, em suma, já não há vizinhos, nem amigos, nem inimigos, nem conhecidos, nem estranhos; não há platéia. O olhar da opinião, esse olhar agudo e judicial, perde a virtude, logo que pisamos o território da morte (Machado, *Memórias póstumas* 55).

As mentioned, the fear of negative public opinion is a key factor in social interaction, causing people to act or say things that they may not truly believe in order to be accepted. Here, this is simply not necessary, as there is no one to answer to or to please. As Cubas concludes this chapter, “não há nada tão incomensurável como o desdém dos finados” (Machado, *Memórias póstumas* 55). Robert H. Moser in his book *The Carnavalesque Defunto*, comments about the purpose of using a deceased narrator in this fashion. As he states, “Machado had found in the defunto autor not only a voice remarkable for its unrestrained candidness but also a worldview that originated from beyond the gaze of public opinion and whose carnivalesque irony exposed the fundamental contradictions between the inner ‘self’ and the social mask” (Moser 150). By giving his narration to a limitless individual, Machado was better able to point out and break down the hypocritical nature of those who act one way in society while thinking very differently behind their “social mask.” Although we must also remember that, like all first-person narrators,

Brás's motivations and portrayal are open for debate; the persona he adopts to recount his life story may be just one more mask.

Twain would concur with this idea, as is particularly evidenced in the fact that 2010 saw the publication of a new autobiography, 100 years after his death. As is stated in the introduction to his work: "[Delaying publication] did free [Twain] to express unconventional thoughts about religion, politics, and the damned human race, without fear of ostracism" (Twain, *Autobiography* 3). While Twain was certainly a man of strong opinions, he was also savvy enough to appreciate the fact that when one makes one's living through publication and lectures, one cannot afford to offend large segments of society, or to put his family at risk of retribution.

In his essay "The Privilege of the Grave" (published in 2009), Twain expresses many of the same sentiments as Machado does through Brás Cubas. Right from the first sentence we can see this: "[The grave's] occupant has one privilege which is not exercised by any living person: free speech" (Twain, "Privilege" 55). He goes on to clarify that the living do possess the ability to speak freely, but that it is hardly worth the trouble: "As an active privilege, it ranks with the privilege of committing murder: we may exercise it if we are willing to take the consequences" (Twain, "Privilege" 55). This may seem a bit harsh, but for that reason Twain's statement is all the more forceful; the consequences involved with being truly frank with others are such that one might as well have committed a violent act, for both lead to being ostracized by society. As he continues:

[I]t would be found that in matters of opinion no departed person was exactly what he had passed for in life; that out of fear, or out of calculated wisdom, or out of reluctance to wound friends, he had long kept to himself certain views not suspected by his little world, and had carried them unuttered to the grave. And

then the living would be brought by this to a poignant and reproachful realization of the fact that they, too, were tarred by that same brush. They would realize, deep down, that they, and whole nations along with them, are not really what they seem to be – and never can be (Twain, “Privilege” 59).

The only true escape from the hypocrisy of having to keep up appearances around others is the grave, for it is the only time when no one can criticize you in person.

Machado’s short story “Galeria póstuma” (1883) also shows characteristics of this desire not to reveal one’s true feelings while alive, albeit in a less “intentional” way. Rather than the deliberate posthumous writing advocated by Twain and done by Brás Cubas, the deceased man of this tale kept a series of journals throughout his life in which he chronicled his rather negative and unflattering descriptions of those around him, and it is doubtful that he ever intended for anyone else to read them. It is only after his passing that his nephew discovers these writings, getting for the first time a glimpse into his uncle’s true self. As the nephew realizes, “Estou lendo um coração, livro inédito. Conhecia a edição pública, revista e expurgada. Este é o texto primitivo e interior, a lição exata e autêntica” (Machado, “Galeria póstuma” 225). This dead man, Joaquim Fidélis, kept his own counsel when it came to how he viewed his society, a fact which in turn led him to be much-loved among his friends and family. The nephew decides to withhold the journals rather allowing his uncle’s character to become tarnished in the minds of his friends.

Reputations are rather tenuous constructs, as in “Galeria póstuma,” and one thing that can have a great effect on one’s status is gossip. This informal dissemination of ideas is particularly commonplace in small towns, where everyone knows everyone’s neighbor, but is not limited to those areas. Even in large cities within a particular segment of society gossip is rampant. In

*Memorial de Aires*, the title character, now retired and filling his days with visits to friends and the writing of his memoirs, sees nothing wrong with the passing along of information in this way: “A maledicência não é tão mau costume como parece. Um espírito vadio ou vazio, ou ambas estas coisas acha nela útil emprego. E depois a intenção de mostrar que outros não prestam para nada, se nem sempre é fundada, muita vez o é, e basta que o seja alguma vez para justificar as outras” (Machado 94). Particularly amusing is the last part, where he justifies this practice by stating that although gossip at times may be incorrect, the fact that it is sometimes accurate makes up for when it is not.

Twain also comments on gossip, characterizing it in terms of the status it gives the one spreading the news. In *The Innocents Abroad* he makes the following observation: “It is human nature to take delight in exciting admiration. It is what prompts children to say ‘smart’ things, and do absurd ones, and in other ways ‘show off’ when company is present. It is what makes gossips turn out in rain and storm to be the first to tell a startling bit of news” (Twain, *The Innocents Abroad* 214-5). Here we see again the need to be the center of attention, to be seen by one’s contemporaries as someone important.

Being the source of a particularly good piece of gossip is not the only way to make one feel significant. In his essay “Conversations with Satan,” Twain shows us this in a discussion of the relative merits of different types of stoves. The human participant in the conversation is a proponent of stoves made by the Germans, saying that he feels they are better than the ones made in America. When he asks Satan if he also prefers that type, Satan replies in the negative, and goes on to elaborate: “He named sixty-four varieties of stoves and house-furnaces. Dear me, those old familiar names – they were all American! But I didn’t say anything. I was ashamed; and yet at the same time I was conscious of a private little thrill of patriotic pride in the reflection



that in a humble way we had been able to add a little discomfort to hell (Twain, “Conversations” 37). Forging the furnaces used to heat Hell is not something to be proud of, and yet this man shows that he cannot help taking some joy in the fact that a product made by his countrymen would be selected for so famous – or infamous – a purpose, perhaps a commentary on America’s high opinions of its own industriousness and economic standing in the world.

A main component in the formation of one’s public persona seems to derive from the desire to look one’s best in front of others. In many instances this revolves around members of the elitist segment of society, who naturally wish to keep themselves viewed as superior to the lower classes. Public opinion though can manifest itself in a number of ways, from social interactions to merely allowing oneself to become the object of envy and admiration. What we will see in the following examples though is that there is always more than meets the eye when one looks at one’s fellow human beings.

To a certain extent, there is an element of the old adage that “the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence.” Being a fickle lot, people tend to want what they do not have, even more so when it is forbidden to them. In *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, the title character, being raised by his strict but loving Aunt Polly, is not permitted to associate with the son of the town drunk, a boy called Huckleberry Finn. The reasons for this are simply that Huck has no rules governing his life, and for that is deemed a bad influence. As he is described, “Huckleberry was cordially hated and dreaded by all the mothers of the town, because he was idle and vulgar and bad – and because all their children admired him so” (Twain, *Tom Sawyer* 39-40). What the children admired was that Huck was the only person free from the constraints of manners, who did not have to maintain any level of decency (as society defined it), and was therefore what the other children saw as an emblem of the carefree life that they could never fully embrace.

An interesting point to make here is that Huck himself was perfectly happy to accept the role that society had carved out for him. As Twain scholar Tom Quirk observes, “Huck Finn may be a social outcast, but he was cast out of a specific social order. He was ignored or rejected by a town that supposedly knew him by virtue of his condition and his deficiencies . . . Huck accepts the town’s assessment of him and has grown comfortable in it” (160). He is an exception to the idea that people strive to elevate themselves in the eyes of their community; Huck not only did not wish to better himself, he in fact shrank from any attempts to do so, such as running away from the Widow Douglas who sought to adopt and “civilize” him.

More often than not though, the people who become the objects of envy are on the other end of the societal spectrum from Huck Finn. Rather than desiring a life of poverty, even if it is in a sense freer, most would prefer to be able to put aside financial burdens and indulge in a more lucrative existence. Those with money and influence are the ones being placed on pedestals of admiration, even if their actual comportment is anything but commendable.

Though not actively pursuing a life of disrespectability, there are those who seem to revel in its pleasures, even boasting about it when out in public. In Machado’s *Esau e Jacó*, the narrator makes this commentary about Counselheiro Aires: “aos pés de um padre seria obrigado a mentir, tais eram os seus pecados; mas ali, na estrada, ao ar livre, entre senhoras, confessou que matara mais de um rival” (157). Whether these killings actually occurred is irrelevant; Aires made himself look brave and important by “confessing” to them, in spite of the fact that he would not feel comfortable admitting such actions to a priest.

Bento, in the novel *Dom Casmurro*, also enjoys being the object of praise. As a child, a family friend once told his mother that Bento was a “prodígio,” a fact which the child never forgot: “Eu, posto não avaliasse todo o valor deste outro elogio, gostava do elogio; era um

elogio” (Machado, *Dom Casmurro* 55). This sort of need for validation through public opinion remains constant throughout his adult life as well, and can also be seen in his various acquaintances. After marrying his childhood sweetheart, Capitu, the two move away from the main section of Rio. However, it is not long before both, but particularly his wife, want to walk through the city, showing off their newly married state: “[Para Capitu] não lhe bastava ser casada entre quatro paredes e algumas árvores; precisava do resto do mundo também. E quando eu me vi embaixo, pisando as ruas com ela, parando, olhando, falando, senti a mesma coisa. Inventava passeios para que me vissem, me confirmassem e me invejassem” (Machado, *Dom Casmurro* 200). Bento and Capitu were not actually any better than anyone else, but they still enjoyed a certain elevated status granted by their marriage and social standing (he was also an up and coming lawyer).

Twain has an essay that contains a pertinent metaphor for this idea of appearances and labels being more important than any inherent value. In “Conversations with Satan,” a series of discussions on random details of humanity, an incident emerges involving cigars. The narrator (the man talking with Satan) tells of how he had purchased a case of a seemingly inferior brand of cigars that he himself liked, and rather than try to convince his friends of their worth, he merely wrapped them in fancy labels and stood back to watch his friends enjoy them. At a later date, he offers these same cigars, this time without the pretty packaging. The result was less than favorable, with his friends disposing of the cigars as soon as they left the house. The narrator’s conclusion:

What an exposure of human nature it is. Those were the same cigars that had lifted those people into heaven a year before. They had smoked all their lives, yet they knew nothing about cigars. The only way they could tell a fine cigar from a

poor one was by the label and the box; and the great majority of men are just like them. The wine merchant and the cigar dealer have an easy chance to get rich, for it is merely a matter of knowing how to select the right labels (Twain, “Conversations” 44).

The moral of this story is that what is seen on the outside weighs heavier in people’s minds than whatever is on the inside.

To that end, another of Machado’s characters, Brás Cubas, enjoyed the prestige coming from a distinguished lineage. Or at least that was what he would have people believe. In truth, his impressive genealogy was not what it seemed:

Como este apelido de Cubas lhe cheirasse excessivamente a tanoaria, alegava meu pai, bisneto do Damião, que o dito apelido fora dado a um cavaleiro, herói nas jornadas da África, em prêmio da façanha que praticou, arrebatando trezentas cubas aos mouros. Meu pai era homem de imaginação; escapou à tanoaria nas asas de um *calembour* (Machado, *Memórias póstumas*, 20).

Here this family’s entrance into the upper class came about not by merit but rather by design, and the family does what it needs to in order to maintain its status.

Elite families, though praised by the rest of society, often in actuality are not as elegant as they may seem. Mark Twain comments on this fact in many of his works. In *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* the narrator Hank Morgan, a traveler from the nineteenth century finding himself transported back to the world of Camelot, is useful as a protagonist in that he is an outside observer of this community. As Stephen Railton describes the situation, “Hank gives Twain a realistic narrative vantage point outside the culture he moves through, a habit of looking that will not succumb to the enchantments and idealizations on which literary romance thrives, a

way, in other words, of seeing what is ‘really there’” (78). In this vein, this character criticizes the nobility of Camelot, and with them upper class people in general: “the highest and first ladies and gentlemen in England had remained little or no cleaner in their talk, and in the morals and conduct which such talk implies, clear up to a hundred years ago” (Twain 20). Later on, after much time spent traveling the countryside incognito with King Arthur, he observes, commenting on the king’s lack of good qualities, “there is nothing diviner about a king than there is about a tramp, after all. He is just a cheap and hollow artificiality when you don’t know he is a king” (Twain, *Connecticut Yankee* 214). In other words, it is the royalty’s superficial trappings, their clothing and servants, that make them seem noble, and not any inherent personal quality.

Machado says essentially this as well in *Esaú e Jacó*. Dona Cláudia, wife of a politician (who spends more time plotting political maneuvers than her husband does), knows how to adorn herself in order to keep up appearances. As Machado describes, “o chapéu da mulher é que dava a nota verdadeira do gosto, das maneiras e da cultura da sociedade. Na valia a pena aceitar uma presidência para levar chapéus sem graça, dizia ela sem convicção, porque intimamente pensava que a presidência dá graça a tudo” (*Esaú e Jacó* 104). In other words, as Twain is quoted as saying, “Clothes make the man. Naked people have little or no influence on society” (Ayres 43).

Although Twain comments on the hypocritical or paradoxical nature of the upper class in many of his writings, one of the most vivid portraits can be found in the novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. The family in question is that of the Grangerfords, a group that Huck comes across on his voyage south on the Mississippi River. The Grangerfords live a comfortable life, with a rather opulent house:

I hadn’t seen no house out in the country before that was so nice and had so much style. It didn’t have a an iron latch on the front door . . . but a brass knob to turn,

the same as houses in town . . . There was a clock on the middle of the mantelpiece, with a picture of a town painted on the bottom half of the glass front . . . [The] table had a cover made out of beautiful oilcloth [that] come all the way from Philadelphia (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 306-7).

The various descriptions of the house and the members of the clan themselves are rather extensive, but the point is that Twain spends a lot of time narrating the great wealth and class that this family enjoys through their personal possessions.

However, as the story progresses, we find out that the Grangerfords are involved in a lengthy and bloody feud with another family, and indeed this fight consumes most of their waking thoughts. At this point, no one even really knows the origin, but that does nothing to lessen the animosity felt by both sides. This dichotomy of a classy exterior coupled with the violence of this rivalry is commented on by Claudis Durst Johnson:

The way in which this so-called stylish décor fits into the whole story of the Grangerfords' lives emphasizes the tragedy of their story . . . On the outside is a thin veneer of fashionable and stylish society with its self-conscious display of polite manners, Christian books, churchgoing, and elegant parties. At the core, however, is not civilized society at all, but savagery, as they slaughter their neighbors (231).

Unlike the previous examples of hypocrisy in society, this one has dangerous, even lethal, consequences.

Continuing along this darker theme, in particular regarding how the human race has a tendency to portray itself in a noble light while in actuality engaging in more savage pursuits, we take a look at some of Twain's later writings. In his essay "Man's Place in the Animal World"

(1896), Mark Twain refers to humanity in a number of critical ways, calling Man the “Cruel Animal,” “the only Slave,” “the only Patriot,” “the Religious Animal” and the “Reasoning Animal” (156-8). For each of these terms he provides an analysis of the downfall represented; for instance, to refute the “Reasoning Animal” claim, which might on the surface seem praiseworthy, Twain states that, “[Man’s] record is the fantastic record of a maniac. I consider that the strongest count against his intelligence is the fact that with that record back of him he blandly sets himself up as the head animal of the lot; whereas by his own standards he is the bottom one” (Twain, “Man’s Place” 158). The hypocrisy here, according to Twain, lies in humanity’s apparently erroneous idea that we are somehow superior to other creatures by dint of our intelligence, when our actions towards each other show how inferior we may actually be.

In “The Mysterious Stranger,” which takes place in a small Austrian town in 1590, a group of young boys make the acquaintance of a being who has unimaginable powers and knowledge about the human race. Twain gives him the name “Satan,” referring to his own interpretation of this Biblical figure as an outside observer of humanity. At one point in the story, Satan has taken his young friends to see a torture chamber, in use by the Inquisition. One of the boys, so sickened by what he sees the torturers doing to their victim, calls the goings-on a “brutal thing.” Satan denies this statement, saying that what was being done was in fact strictly human:

You should not insult the brutes by such a misuse of that word; they have not deserved it . . . It is like your paltry race – always lying, always claiming virtues which it hasn’t got, always denying them to the higher animals, which alone possess them. No brute ever does a cruel thing – that is the monopoly of those with the Moral Sense. When a brute inflicts pain, he does it innocently . . . And

he does not inflict pain for the pleasure of inflicting it – only man does that  
(Twain, “The Mysterious Stranger” 38).

Twain uses this term “Moral Sense” in a very ironic way; rather than indicating something which serves as a compass to point a person towards what is morally right, it ends up merely obscuring the facts of the case, giving a person a way of justifying his actions to himself (similar to the precepts of *Humanitas*). Twain criticizes Lawrence I. Berkove and Joseph Csicsila analyze this aspect of Twain’s personal theology, saying that although he did not like this and other similar ideas, he “held to them because he continuously found them to be accurate and efficacious in describing the world and the human race he knew and the God he believed in” (17).

Returning to “Man’s Place in the Animal World,” we find a clearer definition of what the Moral Sense is and what its true function has become: “It is the quality *which enables him to do wrong*” (Twain 159). Without a clear definition of which behavior is “right” there can be no concept of “wrong” actions. Therefore the point here is that it is the human invention of morality that, ironically, leads to immoral behavior. Twain defines this as the true nature of the Fall as narrated in the book of Genesis: “the infliction upon man of the Moral Sense; the ability to distinguish good from evil; and with it, necessarily, the ability to *do* evil; for there can be no evil act without the presence of consciousness of it in the doer of it” (“Man’s Place” 159). As Mandia defines it, “Twain believes that the major difference between man and animals is that man has moral sense. Twain, however, says that man’s moral sense makes him inferior to the animals because man knows the difference between right and wrong, so when he chooses wrong, as he usually does, he has no redeeming excuse” (25). These examples then represent the ultimate form of hypocrisy – that the seemingly virtuous human race (at least in its own eyes) in fact contains the least humane creatures on the planet.



Machado and Twain, both great chroniclers of humanity, use their wit and wordplay to paint a portrait of their societies that highlights the inconsistencies of human behavior. In their discussions of such things as lying, altruism, and people's tendency to succumb to the force of public opinion, we see the way in which their historical epoch influenced the writings of these great chroniclers of humanity. Gone were the flowery and sentimental descriptions of the Romantics, leaving instead a desire to affect a more Realistic atmosphere in which their readers were forced to consider what was being said in a new way. Whether this ultimately led to people changing their behavior is irrelevant; the goal was to narrate people and society as they were, whilst using a language that entertained.

### CHAPTER 3: POLITICS – TOPPLING IDOLS

*“descobrir e encobrir. Toda a diplomacia está nestes dois verbos parentes.”*

*--Machado de Assis, Esaú e Jacó*

*“Fleas can be taught nearly anything that a Congressman can.”*

*--Mark Twain, What is Man?*

The world of politics has long been fodder for comedic material, and Mark Twain and Machado de Assis both partook of this tradition. It is a bit more difficult finding common themes in this area, as the political situations of their respective countries were very different – Twain lived in a bipartisan democracy, briefly interrupted by the American Civil War; Machado lived first during the Empire under Dom Pedro II, and then was witness to the change from this to the Old Republic, which on the surface was democratic, but really in many ways held onto the old system. Nevertheless, each author in his own way found much fodder for ridicule, which found its way into his novels and other writings.

Hypocrisy in politics is universal, and the primary foible pointed out by both Machado and Twain. For each of them, there was a considerable gap between how politicians portrayed themselves and how they really acted, and thusly between what people expected of their leaders and what these figures actually accomplished. We shall see this contradiction exemplified in the ways in which politicians and political systems are presented. Though democratic institutions will be the primary focus for both authors, Twain also had serious problems with monarchical systems, a fact made particularly evident in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. For Machado, the work that perhaps contains the most description of political life in Brazil is that of *Esau e Jacó*, which portrays the eternal conflict between the two opposing sides as the country moved from Empire to Republic. Other topics of interest include the ever-present and influential idea of mob mentality, where a small group can affect the majority merely by making it afraid to be seen disagreeing.

In addition to these topics revolving around hypocrisy, I will also examine extracts from each author of works related to what may have been the most hot-button issue of each society in the late nineteenth century – that of slavery. Each writer approaches this topic somewhat

obliquely; as is often the case, one can create a stronger impression in the reader's mind by using subtlety when narrating scenes of great controversy. Both Machado and Twain have examples where the words used by their characters show the extent to which people of each respective society did not consider slaves – whether freed or still in captivity – as human beings. It is always important to remember while reading to look beyond the words on the page in order to fully understand the author's intended meaning.

It cannot be doubted that Twain was a staunch supporter of democracy. Although not blind to its potential shortcomings, stemming from the dishonesty often practiced by politicians, he nonetheless believed that the democratic process was the best way to run a nation. As he stated in *A Connecticut Yankee*, “the fact remains that where every man in a State has a vote, brutal laws are impossible” (143). In terms of party politics, Twain stated that, “To lodge all power in one party and keep it there is to insure bad government and the sure and gradual deterioration of the public morals” (Ayres 180). This idea of “moral deterioration” fits in well with Twain's overall perceptions of politics. As Louis J. Budd described it, “By politics he meant . . . a slimy mixture of graft, demagoguery, and nimble-footed service to party bosses” (37). The cynicism with which Twain contemplated his society's political system will be very evident in the examples of this chapter.

Politicians in particular fell victim to his scrutiny, as we shall see, in part because they did not, in Twain's view, live up to the pedestal on which they frequently were placed. As Twain critic Stephen Railton observes, referring to a knight from *Connecticut Yankee* who finds wearing his armor rather arduous, “[Twain's] uncomfortable knight is burlesque with a purpose, physical comedy with its roots in democratic principles (making a titled knight laughable subverts the idea of class superiority) . . . [Twain] is using humor to topple the idols his society

worshipped” (77). As always, Mark Twain uses his humoristic language to point out problems in the world around him, making something ridiculous in order to deflate its assumed importance. In this case, with the example of a knight struggling with his armor, we see the employment of indirect satire – making this supposedly high-class individual look foolish by dint of falling victim to his own wardrobe.

Twain, always living under the principles of democracy set forth by the writers of the American Constitution, understandably shows a preference for this form of government: “beneath his gruff disenchantment with the politicians of his time lay a deep love of democracy and a profound desire to preserve American liberty” (Ayres 90). However, it seems that Machado too favored a system by which the majority chooses its leaders and policies. In a writing dated July 7, 1882, he makes the following statement:

Onde quer que vivam em comunidade social muitos seres, é indispensável o regime da maioria, pelo qual prevaleceu a deliberação do maior número, que implicitamente obriga a todos que se acham reunidos em sociedade. É tão elementar este princípio de sociabilidade que o vemos respeitado até entre os animais que vivem em comum, os quais obedecem evidentemente a uma direção, confiada no consenso da maioria. Nos tempos modernos, as sociedades humanas não se dirigem por outro princípio (Machado, “Sereníssima” 147).

There are still definite critiques at work here, as at that time only a very small portion of the population was allowed to participate in elections, and in the early stages there were issues of corruption and abuse of power; nevertheless, the ideas had been put in place to lead to a more egalitarian society.

It is easy to see where the hypocrisy so often criticized by Machado stems from, as he lived in a rather contradictory time in Brazil's history. Machado expert John Gledson gives a good summary of the Brazil of that era:

During most of Machado's lifetime . . . Brazil was an empire, ruled by an enlightened monarch . . . with an established constitution, two parties . . . which alternated in power, and a system of elections . . . The fact that the differences between the parties were often more apparent than real, that the Emperor could, in the last resort, simply impose a new government which would then rig the elections and that a miniscule proportion of the population were allowed to vote, shows that the representative nature of the regime was a farce. (*Deceptive Realism* 4).

This "farcical" nature of the government would necessarily spill over into society, revealing itself in many ways within the world of politics.

One such area is in the attitude of the citizens of Brazil themselves and the way in which they approach changes in the political climate. In a crônica dating from May 11, 1888, a mere two days before the emancipation of slavery, Machado talks about how among the people there seemed to be a definite lack of commitment to a cause: "Toda a gente contempla a procissão na rua, as bandas e bandeiras, o alvoroço, o tumulto, e aplaude ou censura, segundo é abolicionista ou outra coisa; mas ninguém dá a razão desta coisa ou daquela coisa; ninguém arrancou aos fatos uma significação, e, depois, uma opinião" (56). Here one can see the wishy-washy nature of human opinion, how people can celebrate (or revile) an occasion without worrying about the motivations behind it. In the world of politics, this can be particularly harmful, as it could indicate people putting their support behind a candidate or an idea, not because they truly believe

this individual or philosophy will bring about a positive outcome, but because they were amused by some showman or celebration.

There are many moments where Machado de Assis discusses politics, but perhaps the most complete portrayal of government in Brazil occurs in the novel *Esau e Jacó*. Here, two twin brothers, Pedro and Paulo, rivals throughout their entire lives, are used to personify the two sides of politics at the end of the nineteenth century. Pedro, loyal supporter of the emperor, represents the old ways, in which there is one ruler, reminiscent of the monarchies of Europe. Paulo, in contrast, embraces the changing state of democracy and the ideals of the fledgling republic. John Gledson characterizes the purpose of this choice of protagonists thusly:

Machado viu sua própria sociedade desorientada, sofrendo de uma falta de objetivos já presente, em embrião, em períodos anteriores, mas agora atingindo um nível que se aproximava à total desintegração. O romance especula sobre as causas históricas para isso, embora sem ser demasiado dogmático ou exclusivista: a preocupação maior, aqui, é retratar a situação, ou fazer com que seja percebida (*Ficção e história* 170).

Each brother represents one side of the political situation, and the two are never able to reconcile their differences, in this way showing the conflicts within Brazilian society that would cause political tensions over the next decades.

Very early on in the novel one can see these men's political leanings. One evening, when the twins were sixteen years old, there were a number of people over visiting the family. One of these asked them their age, receiving this response:

Paulo respondeu:

– Nasci no aniversário do dia em que Pedro I caiu do trono.

E Pedro:

– Nasci no aniversário do dia em que Sua Majestade subiu ao trono (Machado, *Esau e Jacó* 51).

Even at this young age it is clear that one leans towards monarchy and the other decidedly away from it.

One scene which perhaps best exemplifies the contrast between the two brothers occurs when they are teenagers. The two are walking through the streets one day, and pass by a portrait shop. They go in, and Pedro is immediately drawn to one of the paintings: “Pedro viu pendurado um retrato de Luís XVI, entrou e comprou-o por oitocentos réis . . . Paulo quis ter igual fortuna, adequada às suas opiniões, e descobriu um Robespierre” (Machado, *Esau e Jacó* 53). This second painting was more expensive – 1200 réis – which became a bone of contention for Pedro. He argued that a martyred king should not be considered less valuable than a traitor, an opinion not shared by his brother. Of course to the shop owner, the difference in value had more to do with his own expense in acquiring the portrait than in its subject’s history. The two brothers do eventually make their purchases, each hanging his painting over his bed. However, ever after, the fight continues, with each “modifying” the other’s acquisition: “ambos faziam pirraças às pobres gravures . . . Eram orelhas de burro, nomes feios, desenhos de animais, até que um dia Paulo rasgou a de Pedro, e Pedro o de Paulo (Machado, *Esau e Jacó* 56).

Conselheiro Aires, a family friend and confidante, decides that, although politics certainly do impact each twin’s thought process, the real dispute may be more basic. As he explains to their mother:

A razão parece-me ser que o espírito de inquietação reside em Paulo, e o de conservação em Pedro. Um já se contenta do que está, outro acha que é pouco e



pouquíssimo, e quisera ir ao ponto a que não foram homens. Em suma, não lhes importam formas de governo, contanto que a sociedade fique firme ou se atire para diante (Machado, *Esau e Jacó* 184).

In other words, the real issue may in fact be that of change versus status quo, which in the Brazil of that epoch constituted democracy versus empire.

Aires finds himself called upon to help out in another way in this constant struggle between governments, in this case with a neighbor of his who owns a candy store. This man finds himself needing a new sign for his business, but what with all the changes going on, he is unsure what to write. His shop had always borne the name *Confeitaria do Império*, but with the possibility of the empire being disbanded, he does not want to draw negative attention to himself. To that end, he thought perhaps of going with *Confeitaria do Governo*, but this presented its own problems, as the storekeeper explains: “nenhum governo deixa de ter oposição. As oposições, quando descenderem à rua, podem implicar comigo, imaginar que as desafio, e quebrarem-me a tabuleta” (Machado, *Esau e Jacó* 115). They finally decide that the best bet would be *Confeitaria do Custódio*, naming the place after its proprietor and thereby avoiding any potential political reprisals.

What the store owner and Aires were essentially trying to avoid was trouble arising by certain individuals taking offense to the name on the sign, possibly inciting a riot. This type of action, in which a few people can cause an entire group to act out against others, is that of mob mentality, a phenomenon addressed both in Machado’s work and even more so in Twain’s writings.

Twain frequently refers to the inherently cowardly nature of humankind. He characterizes this through descriptions of mob mentality, that is, the way in which people will

compromise their own beliefs or opinions to follow the larger group, even if the ultimate consequences prove disastrous and damaging to their own or someone else's life. What is most emphasized though is the distinct lack of intelligence employed – people act purely on instinct, and are as likely as not to completely change their attitude when confronted by a new idea or a force stronger than themselves.

Huck Finn, in his novel, observes a scene in which mob rule takes over. In this case, a man named Sherburn is involved in a duel, from which he emerges victorious. The townspeople, outraged by the blatant murder of the other man, decide to burn Sherburn's house, killing him in the process. They arrive with torches in hand, only to be met at the door. Sherburn's speech not only stops them in their tracks, but gives a clear description of Twain's opinions regarding mobs and, by extension, standing armies:

The average man don't like trouble and danger . . . But if only *half* a man . . . shouts 'Lynch him! lynch him!' you're afraid to back down – afraid you'll be found out to be what you are – *cowards* – and so you raise a yell, and hang yourselves onto that half-a-man's coat tail, and come raging up here, swearing what big things you're going to do. The pitifulest thing out is a mob; that's what an army is – a mob; they don't fight with courage that's born in them, but with courage that's borrowed from their mass, and from their officers. But a mob without any *man* at the head of it, is *beneath* pitifulness (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 202-3).

The key idea here is that what a mob truly represents is the inherent cowardice of people, that they are unwilling to make their own decisions if it goes against the group. As a farmer sums up

the situation in *Connecticut Yankee*, “I helped to hang my neighbors for that it were peril to my own life to show lack of zeal in the master’s cause” (182).

Machado also comments on this kind of situation in his novel *Esau e Jacó*. Conselheiro Aires is walking through Rio one day when he comes across a group surrounding a suspect being taken to prison. In this case, the crowd was on the side of the prisoner, insisting that he be released. The soldiers escorting him spoke to the crowd of his crime, which made them back off a bit, only to begin again their shouts of support for this man.

This scene becomes more relevant later, when Aires reflects upon what he had witnessed. He sees in the actions of these citizens elements of human nature, namely the idea of accepting laws but at the same time maintaining a desire to rebel against authority. As his musings are described:

[Ele] imaginou que a grita da multidão protestante era filha de um velho instinto de resistência à autoridade. Advertiu que o homem, uma vez criado, desobedeceu logo ao Criador, que aliás, lhe dera um paraíso para viver; mas não há paraíso que valha o gosto da oposição. Que o homem se acostume às leis, vá; que incline o colo à força e ao bel-prazer, vá também; é o que se dá com a planta quando sopra o vento. Mas que abençoe a força e cumpra as leis sempre . . . é violar a liberdade primitiva, a liberdade do velho Adão (Machado, *Esau e Jacó* 76).

We can see here a different take on the use of mob scenes in literature, but it is still interesting in the way in which Machado analyses the ever contradictory nature of humanity. People may become accustomed to the law, but the idea that they will always obey it is folly, as it is in human nature always to seek ways to disobey, to insist upon one’s right to the freedom of making decisions.

Human nature also dictates lack of consistency; people are constantly reinventing themselves and their beliefs according to whim or circumstance. In this vein few spheres of society can rival the world of politics, and one cannot discuss the world of politics without taking some time to analyze the comportment of the politicians themselves. Many negative stereotypes can be applied to this group, such as the idea that they are all corrupt liars who merely ingratiate themselves to their constituents long enough to get elected, and once in office spend the rest of their term failing to live up to their campaign slogans. As Twain scholar Patricia M. Mandia states, “Twain’s satire attacks . . . democracies, with their power-crazed aspirants to office who will take any action, whether it be deceitful or violent, to attain the position they want” (95). Machado’s words will do the same for Brazil. This world of politics is certainly a difficult one, where one spends most of one’s time trying to implement change while navigating the murky waters of partisan politics. Both Twain and Machado portray this side of society, and, as one might expect, those being described do not always come out in a positive light.

In his novel *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, Twain shows life in a small town through the ingenuous eyes of a young boy and his friends. One point in the novel shows a series of celebrations, including those for Independence Day. Tom is sorely disappointed in the festivities: “it rained hard, there was no procession in consequence, and the greatest man in the world (as Tom supposed), Mr. Benton, an actual United States senator, proved an overwhelming disappointment – for he was not twenty-five feet high, nor even anywhere in the neighborhood of it” (Twain, *Tom Sawyer* 132). Politicians are so elevated in importance that Tom cannot fathom why this man should not physically manifest the grandeur of his appointment.

In other ways, though, the world of politics holds little allure for this child. The boys would often get together and play, acting out scenes from the adventure books Tom loved to

read. After a particularly exhilarating game of Robin Hood, they head off to their respective homes, as Twain narrates: “[They] went off grieving that there were no outlaws anymore, and wondering what modern civilization could claim to have done to compensate for their loss. They said they would rather be outlaws a year in Sherwood Forest than President of the United States forever” (*Tom Sawyer* 57). Grandiose though politicians may seem, as shown in the previous scene from this novel, their lives cannot compare to the adventures created in the minds of these kids. To them, the world of politics seems dull and uninviting, where the officials themselves do not measure up and the offices they inhabit leave much to be desired.

Machado portrays political life from a more adult perspective, but one cannot help but wonder if there aren’t children involved somewhere behind the scenes. Take for instance a *crônica* that dates from May 4, 1888, in which he retells an interview he had – or tried to have – with a senator from Ceará. Apparently this particular state’s political situation was a bit confusing, so Machado was requesting some clarification. Here is a segment of the dialog, beginning with Machado:

- Saberá V. Ex.<sup>a</sup> que eu não entendo patavina dos partidos do Ceará. . .
- Com efeito. . .
- Eles são dois, mas quatro; ou, mais acertadamente, são quatro, mas dois.
- Dois em quatro.
- Quatro em dois.
- Dois, quatro.
- Quatro, dois.
- Quatro.
- Dois.

- Dois.
- Quatro.
- Justamente.
- Não é?
- Claríssimo (Machado, “4 de maio de 1888” 54).

It is a bit ironic the way the senator ends, as this exchange is anything but clear. As the two continue speaking, it becomes more and more evident that this figure does not understand the political parties in existence in Ceará any more than Machado does. But, like the true politician that he is, the senator keeps trudging along, regardless of whether anything he says actually makes any sense. He knows that the only way to survive in this world of politics is to put up a good front, and never back down from the position that he does in fact know what he is talking about. The true impact and humor of this scene would be best appreciated with a clearer and more complete knowledge of the situation to which Machado is referring; however, even without that one can still enjoy the comedic way in which the exchange is written.

In *Esau e Jacó*, the world of politics is a main protagonist in the story, one which holds profound influence over the lives of everyone. Batista, the father of the love interest of the title characters, find himself torn between the ideals he holds and the changing face of the nation as it transitions from empire to republic. His wife Cláudia is a social-climber, determined to keep her husband in power regardless of what his own wishes might be. He values her opinion, although as one can see it seems to be more from the position of hen-pecked husband than from actual commitment to the cause:

Só lhe faltava ação, mas a mulher podia inspirar-lhe; nunca deixou de consultá-la nas crises da presidência. Agora mesmo, se lhe desse ouvidos, já teria ido pedir

alguma coisa ao governo, mas neste ponto era firme, de uma firmeza que nascia de fraqueza: “Hão de chamar-me, deixa estar,” dizia ele a D. Cláudia, quando aparecia alguma vaga de governo provincial. Certo é que ele sentia a necessidade de tornar à vida ativa. Nele a Política era menos uma opinião que uma sarna; precisava coçar-se a miúdo e com força (Machado, *Esau e Jacó* 62).

As we can infer from this last sentence, political life was perhaps not Batista’s ideal situation, but given that it was the world into which he had entered, he determined to make the best of it.

In spite of the constant uphill battle faced due to his wife’s nagging and his own disinterest, Batista does learn ways in which to maintain some foothold in the political arena, however tenuous, primarily in terms of how to act around others. In a dialogue with Counselor Aires, he explains himself (Batista speaks first):

- Confesso-lhe que tenho o temperamento conservador.
- Também eu guardo presentes antigos.
- Não é isso: refiro-me ao temperamento político. Verdadeiramente há opiniões e temperamentos. Um homem pode muito bem ter o temperamento oposto às suas idéias. As minhas idéias, se as cotejarmos com os programas políticos do mundo, são antes liberais e algumas libérrimas (Machado, *Esau e Jacó* 101).

Machado begins by showing his verbal wit, poking fun at the terminology used, having Aires misunderstand “conservador” first as referring to one who retains things rather than as a political stance. However once Batista explains his beliefs, what he reveals is a clever way of never having to come down too heavily on one side or the other of an issue. In other words, taking up this sort of stance is an easy way to maintain oneself in a politically neutral state, thereby being able to switch easily between parties depending on how the wind blows.

We see this as well in Machado's newspaper writing, returning to "11 de maio de 1888." The narrator is speaking with a man on the street about the indications abolition could have for society. Here is part of the dialogue:

- Mas então quem é que está aqui doido?
- É o senhor; o senhor é que perdeu o pouco juízo que tinha. Aposto que não vê que anda alguma coisa no ar.
- Vejo; creio que é um papagaio.
- Não, senhor; é uma república. Querem ver que também não acredita que esta mudança é indispensável?
- Homem, eu, a respeito de governos estou com Aristóteles, no capítulo dos chapéus. O melhor chapéu é o que vai bem à cabeça. Este, por ora, não vai mal (Machado, "11 de maio de 1888" 58).

The reference to Aristotle is, according to the editor's footnote to the *crônica*, apocryphal, but one can see its meaning here. Machado is using "hats" to signify something that is prominently worn but easily changed, as many people do with their political leanings. The best hat is the one that looks best on its wearer, a fashion that can change with the seasons, and therefore the political system that one prefers is the one that best conforms to one's ideas at any given time.

Partisan politics can have their problems, but nevertheless for many they are the best way to maintain a fair system, particularly when compared to the alternatives. As a staunch believer in the democratic style of government, Twain minced no words when it came to expressing his disdain for monarchical systems. As Huckleberry Finn so concisely states, "all kings is mostly rascallions, as fur as I can make out" (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 208). This author could not accept any form of absolute power (a theme which will recur in the next chapter as regards the



idea of an Established Church), a fact which is very evident in the novel *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, in which the protagonist, finding himself inexplicably thrust back into the court of Camelot, sets about to use his nineteenth century know-how to forever alter sixth century society, including subverting the assumed authority of the monarch and his minions. As Hank Morgan states, "I had inherited the idea that human daws who can consent to masquerade in the peacock-shams of inherited dignities and unearned titles, are of no good but to be laughed at" (Twain, *Connecticut Yankee* 38-9).

This particular segment of stratified society, that of the nobility, would not survive long if left to its own devices. During one segment of the novel, Morgan decides to disguise himself as a peasant in order to pass unnoticed among the people. King Arthur, upon hearing this, insists on joining him, and at virtually every step of the way proves himself incapable of even the most basic means of survival and subtlety. Morgan finds himself more and more convinced, the longer he lives in this kingdom, that the upper class is really an inefficient lot:

It is enough to make a body ashamed of his race to think of the sort of froth that had always occupied its thrones without shadow of right or reason, and the seventh-rate people that have always figured as aristocracies – a company of monarchs and nobles who, as a rule, would have achieved only poverty and obscurity if left, like their betters, to their own exertions (Twain, *Connecticut Yankee* 38).

The "betters" he refers to here are the commoners, that industrious group without whom the kingdom would fall apart. Morgan, and thusly Twain, frequently refers to the positive nature of the industry and hard work performed by the peasants, showing by contrast the idle and useless nature of the royalty.

So what then would be the ideal solution? Clarence, Morgan's right-hand man, proposes an ironic alternative to monarchs:

[T]hen have cats. [Clarence] was sure that a royal family of cats would answer every purpose. They would be as useful as any other royal family, they would know as much . . . they would be laughably vain and absurd and never know it . . . And as a rule . . . the character of these cats would be considerably above the character of the average king . . . because it would presently be noticed that they hanged nobody, beheaded nobody, imprisoned nobody, inflicted no cruelties or injustices of any sort, and so must be worthy of a deeper love and reverence than the customary human king (Twain, *Connecticut Yankee* 242).

Because they would not be prone to the vanities and petty resentments common to humans, cats would be able to rule without hurting the populace, a practice very frequently engaged throughout the pages of this novel. This quote shows an example of paradox – on the surface, nothing said here makes sense; however, looking more closely, we can see where there is some validity to the argument. Of course it would not be at all practical to restructure a government in this way, but Twain uses this analogy to show his contempt for aristocracy, claiming it could easily be replaced in a rather ridiculous manner, but without losing much of its essential character.

Machado also uses the animal kingdom to show the inherent flaws of human governments, but rather than suggesting the animals' system as an alternative to what people do, he uses his creatures to show in a new light the short-sightedness and stupidity that so often accompany political processes. As mentioned in the introduction, most of Machado's tales take place within his own social sphere. In this case, by placing the setting in such an alien world, he

appears to place the reader in a position of superiority; after all, these lowly animals are not able to act as rationally and reasonably as human beings. However, as we shall see, everything that happens in the story is based on very human motivations, and one needs only to change the animal references in order to make this tale apply to people.

In the short story “A sereníssima república” (1882), a scientist presents a report of an experiment to other members of his community. What he had done was to learn the language of spiders, and, due to his larger size and intelligence, soon convinced them that he was a deity. He then decided to set them up in a government, using as a model systems that had already been implemented by human societies. The one ultimately decided upon reflected that of ancient Venice, which held elections by placing the candidates’ names in a bag and drawing one at random. This scientist defends his choice, saying that “[Este sistema] exclui os desvarios da paixão, os desazos da inépcia, o congresso da corrupção e da cobiça” (Machado, “Sereníssima” 149). However, as we shall see, these hopes for freedom from corruption do not come to fruition.

Like many nations, including Brazil and the United States, there were two primary political spider parties, and others that were not as significant. Therefore it was assumed that the candidate from one of these two main groups would be elected. This was not the case: “Nem Hazeroth nem Magog foram eleitos. As suas bolas saíram do saco . . . mas foram inutilizadas, a do primeiro por faltar a primeira letra do nome, a do segundo por lhe faltar a última” (Machado, “Sereníssima” 151). The situation quickly deteriorates, with each recount and subsequent election bringing with it new technicalities. In one case they opt to use a sack with a looser weave, so that the balls could be seen by the public and any typos fixed prior to the election.

However, as the narrator states, “o comentário da lei é a eterna malícia” (Machado, “Sereníssima” 152), and this does nothing to solve the problem.

In what is perhaps one of the most elegant transcriptions of political rhetoric I have seen, one of the spiders manages to twist the smallest of typos into a case in which he manages to change the name “Caneca” into “Nebraska.” The name chosen was that of the latter, but the last letter was missing. Caneca brought in a philologist to debate the situation, who began by declaring that the missing consonant must have been left off intentionally, which in turn must have been in order to call attention to the letter “k” at the end of the name. This letter has not only its graphic character but also its sound – “ca.” From here naturally one returns to the beginning of the name, “ne,” and places it with the end, giving “cané.” He then goes through a rather complicated (and poorly explained) process of making the “bras” syllable into “ca,” but in the end: “Mas, suposta a demonstração, aí fica a última prova, evidente, clara, da minha afirmação primeira pela anexação da sílaba *ca* às duas *Cane*, dando este nome Caneca” (Machado, “Sereníssima” 153). After this, the laws governing these elections are changed yet again, showing that there will always be some way to skirt the system, and that political systems can never be truly free from corruption.

Even the most fervent supporters of a nation cannot afford to be completely blind to its flaws. Mark Twain was a firm advocate and believer in the United States. This is not to say though that he was in favor of every aspect of his country’s politics – although an advocate of democracy, he did not believe that all politicians were worth respect. As he states in the essay “The Czar’s Soliloquy”: “The modern patriotism, the true patriotism, the only rational patriotism is loyalty to the *nation* all the time, loyalty to the government when it deserves it” (Ayres 176). Hank Morgan has a similar commentary, this time regarding national institutions:

The country is the real thing, the substantial thing, the eternal thing; it is the thing to watch over, and care for, and be loyal to; institutions are extraneous, they are its mere clothing, and clothing can wear out, become ragged, cease to be comfortable, cease to protect the body from winter, disease, and death. To be loyal to rags, to shout for rags, to worship rags, to die for rags – that is a loyalty of unreason (Twain, *Connecticut Yankee* 65).

Twain certainly was not a proponent of the adage “My country, right or wrong,” instead encouraging people to look critically at what is done and said, making changes as circumstances require.

One area in which Twain called for people to stop and think critically is that of war. Twain was firmly opposed to the idea of countries going to war, declaring that there were no just causes for such an act. In the story “The Mysterious Stranger,” the character called Satan, who represents an omniscient, omnipotent being and not necessarily the Devil, speaks of the pointlessness of war from his own far-seeing perspective: “There has never been a just one, never an honorable one – on the part of the instigator of the war. I can see a million years ahead, and this rule will never change” (Twain 82). He goes on to show how people, while initially resistant to the thought of attacking another nation, can be brought around:

Next the statesman will invent cheap lies, putting the blame upon the nation that is attacked, and every man will be glad of those conscience-soothing falsities, and will diligently study them, and refuse to examine any refutations of them; and thus he will by and by convince himself that the war is just, and will thank God for the better sleep he enjoys after this process of grotesque self-deception (Twain, “The Mysterious Stranger” 83).

As seen earlier in the section on mob mentalities, it only takes an outspoken few to cause the many to act in ways they may not fully embrace; but once the seeds of ideas take root, it is very difficult to shake them.

Another of Twain's short stories that clearly demonstrates this need to look beyond mere appearances is "The War Prayer" (1905). This work, first published in 1923, more than any other shows Twain's aversion to war. In fact, it was published posthumously because Twain's friends and family felt that it would be far too controversial to be released during his lifetime. The basic storyline is that of a country going to war, and in a particular town all the young men are eagerly volunteering to serve in the army. All of the townspeople are enthusiastically behind them, and on the day before they are to ship out, everyone meets at the church for one last prayer and blessing: "in the churches the pastors preached devotion to flag and country and invoked the God of Battles, beseeching His aid in our good cause" (Twain, "The War Prayer" 3).

The pastor, in the midst of an impassioned oratory, is interrupted by the arrival of a withered old man, a stranger to the town. This man goes up to the pulpit and informs the congregation that their prayer had been received, however, "it is like unto many of the prayers of men, in that it asks for more than he who utters it is aware of" (Twain, "The War Prayer" 17). He then proceeds to lead them in the other side of the prayer, the unspoken wishes that must necessarily follow what has been asked for. This new oration shows Twain's expertise in the use of parody to make his point – he mimics the structure of a traditional prayer in order to show the ignorance of the congregation; that while they pray for their own victory in battle, they are forgetting the necessary consequences:

O Lord our Father, our young patriots, idols of our hearts, go forth to battle – be  
Thou near them! . . . O Lord our God, help us to tear their soldiers to bloody

shreds with our shells; help us to cover their smiling fields with the pale forms of their patriot dead; help us to drown the thunder of the guns with the shrieks of their wounded, writhing in pain; help us to lay waste their humble homes with a hurricane of fire; help us to wring the hearts of their unoffending widows with unavailing grief; help us to turn them out roofless with their little children to wander unfriended the wastes of their desolated land . . . We ask it, in the spirit of love, of Him Who is the Source of Love, and Who is the ever-faithful refuge and friend of all that are sore beset and seek His aid with humble and contrite hearts. Amen (Twain, “The War Prayer” 25-27, 31-43, 67-73).

The ultimate irony being the last few lines, where, after asking for so much death and destruction, these people still describe God with such loving qualities.

Machado’s character Quincas Borba, the philosopher who created *Humanitas* as mentioned in the previous chapter, had his own theories on war. His battle cry was “Ao vencedor, as batatas” (Machado, *Quincas Borba* 19). This comes from a hypothetical pondering which supposes a field of potatoes and two opposing tribes who need them to survive. However, there are not enough for both groups: “se as duas tribos dividirem em paz as batatas do campo, não chegam a nutrir-se suficientemente e morrem de inanição. A paz, nesse caso, é a destruição; a guerra é a conservação” (Machado, *Quincas Borba* 19). An ironic look at war, describing it as something designed to save lives rather than lose them. And, as irony implies, by using this voice to discuss this topic, Machado is in fact ridiculing the art of war, and in a more ample sense human nature regarding war. As he states in one of his *crônicas*, “desde que os interessados rompiam assim a solidariedade do direito comum, é que a questão passava a ser de

simples luta pela vida, e eu, em todas as lutas, estou sempre do lado do vencedor. Não digo que este procedimento seja original, mas é lucrativo” (Machado, “11 de maio de 1888” 57).

The greatest example of war that Twain witnessed was the American Civil War, although he himself did not participate in it, choosing instead to head out West with his brother who had been appointed secretary to the governor of Nevada. This event, which lasted from 1861-1865 was a bloody conflict during which President Lincoln issued his historic Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, thereby ending the practice of owning slaves in that country. In Brazil the process of abolition did not occur until over two decades later – in 1888 Princess Isabel signed the *Lei Áurea*, which revoked any further practice of slave-holding. In the works of both authors we can find examples of how both slavery and abolition impacted society, whether greatly or in more subtle ways, in particular in how those of African descent were viewed by the more European members of society.

It is important to preface the analysis of the texts by discussing the very different forms in which race relations played out in each of these societies, as well as what intention each author had (or may have had) in selecting the manner in which he portrayed this problematic. In simple terms, ideas of race, in particular tied into the idea of racial superiority, differed greatly between the two countries. One must fully appreciate this fact in order to look at each author’s work within its own context, and not allow one’s own culture to interfere in how one interprets the story and language.

In the United States, the history of slavery, and in particular the fact that it was one of the main causes of the Civil War, led to a nation with very strained race relations (vestiges of which still reverberate in contemporary American society). Many people in this country held fast to the ideas of racial superiority, that those of European descent were biologically destined to be more



intelligent and capable; in other words, more “human.” During the 1850s, interestingly enough, many debates which centered around slavery did not in fact address the racial question. Instead, they dealt with the idea of popular sovereignty, more specifically with the issue of whether the new Western territories should be settled as free or slave states (Huston 97). No one in politics at that time worried about the way in which slaves were treated, which in and of itself is a good indicator that they were not considered by many to be worth discussion along moral lines.

When the issue was debated in Congress, there was a strong divide between slavery supporters and abolitionists, although the latter were in a definite minority. As James L. Huston reports, referring to statements made in 1854, “Northern Democrats announced their belief in inequality between the races, and forthrightly said that Africans were inferior” and “Southerners defended their peculiar institution from northern assault by stressing the racial inferiority of African Americans” (106). For the other position we have statements such as this made by a near-abolitionist: “Giddings said that moral duty demanded that African Americans be given the right to life, liberty, and happiness: ‘He who bestowed on us his own image, demands that we shall maintain the dignity of our race. If we revere God, we must respect his image’” (Huston 107). It was within this atmosphere of predominantly anti-African sentiment that Twain grew up, which in turn influenced the characters he created.

Racism in Brazil followed a very different pattern, which in turn influences the way in which this topic is treated in modern society. In spite of the fact that slavery lasted longer in Brazil than any other country in the Western hemisphere, there was no concept there of racial superiority among Whites. Thomas E. Skidmore, noted Brazilian historian, discusses this in length in the anthology entitled *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870-1940*, contrasting what occurred there with American society. He discusses how, even in 1870 – eighteen years before

emancipation – there was already a large population of free Blacks in that country, a fact strongly related to the economic need for people working as, in his words, “artisans or cattle herders. In other words, Brazil had economic ‘space’ for free persons of color – unlike most of the American South, where poor whites preempted these positions” (Skidmore, *Idea of Race* 8).

He goes on to make the claim, based on the writings of the intellectual and political elite of that time, that “virtually no one believed in the simple theory of biological inferiority, so abolitionists only rarely tried to refute racist doctrines . . . Exceedingly seldom did [anti-abolitionists] go so far as to claim that Afro-Brazilians were biologically fated to perpetual servitude” (Skidmore, *Idea of Race* 8). In fact, the idea of racial superiority did not develop on its own in Brazil, but rather was imported from Europe and the United States: “Innumerable visitors from North America and Europe reinforced, through their comments, the pseudo-scientific racist writings dominant in their countries” (Skidmore, *Idea of Race* 11).

However, this is not to say that there were no supporters of a genetically-motivated brand of racism in the Brazil of that era. One can find studies and articles written by Brazilian intellectuals which fully embrace the idea that there is a biological inferiority existent in those of African descent. One such proponent is a doctor by the name of Nina Rodrigues, whose ideas were the following: “In 1894 [Rodrigues] dismissed the ‘sentimental’ notion that a ‘representative of the inferior races’ could attain in intelligence ‘the elevated level attained by the superior races’ as ‘hopelessly condemned in the face of modern scientific knowledge’” (Skidmore, *Black into White* 58). He even went so far as to propose that his ideas be used in the legal system: “inherent racial characteristics affected social behavior and should therefore be taken into account by lawmakers and police authorities” (Skidmore, *Black into White* 59). These ideas were not ultimately employed, however. Skidmore also points out in this discussion of

Rodrigues that this man “had gone farther in his acceptance of foreign racist theories than most other members of the Brazilian elite” (Skidmore, *Black into White* 60). So while these ideas, related to those previously mentioned from the United States and Europe, were present in Brazil, the overall atmosphere of racism still had a different flavor.

It would be wrong to make the claim that Brazil wholly adopted these foreign influences, just as it would be wrong to state that, as the popular belief indicates, there is no racism in Brazil. What one must do is accept that it is linked more to social standing than to ethnicity – the term *embranquecimento* or “whitening” is not necessarily related to one’s genetic make-up: “Occasionally this concept of whitening could be read in cultural, not physiological terms . . . [C]olor attributed to an individual became a function of his social position” (Skidmore, *Idea of Race* 9). I bring up these points to counteract arguments that Machado, being the grandson of a slave, did not address this theme of slavery much in his writings because he was denying his heritage. I would argue that his few portrayals of this topic are more related to the fact that as a public figure, a clerk in government, noted columnist and founder of the Brazilian Academy of Letters, he was a prime example of the idea of *embranquecimento*, one who through his own efforts managed to culturally elevate himself to a higher branch of society where his past was no longer relevant.

Returning to an analysis of the texts, one of the main problems which resulted from abolition was what to do with the slaves once freed: “How would ex-slaves be employed? How could they be trained and prepared for a free life?” (Skidmore, *Idea of Race* 9) One can see examples of this polemic in one of Machado’s *crônicas*, dated May 19, 1888, six days after the signing of the *Lei Áurea*. In this piece, the author describes a dinner he gave prior to the passage of this law, in which he declared the freedom of his slave Pancrácio. His motives seem quite

noble: “declarei que, acompanhando as idéias pregadas por Cristo . . . restituía a liberdade ao meu escravo Pancrácio; que entendia que a nação inteira devia acompanhar as mesmas idéias e imitar o meu exemplo” (Machado, “19 de maio de 1888” 63). However we soon realize that there may have been other factors involved in his decision: “De noite [depois do jantar] recebi muitos cartões. Creio que estão pintando o meu retrato, e suponho que a óleo” (Machado, “19 de maio de 1888” 63). After all, what is the point of a noble act if one does not receive the appropriate acclamations?

The next day he speaks with Pancrácio about the future, and offers this man the option to stay on in his employ at a very minimal salary of *seis mil-réis*, an amount which would only pay for two shirts at that time (Machado, “19 de maio de 1888” 63). This young man, only knowing a life of service in his master’s house, accepted everything that was offered him: “Pancrácio aceitou tudo; aceitou até um peteleco que lhe dei no dia seguinte, por me não escovar bem as botas; efeitos da liberdade. Mas eu expliquei-lhe que o peteleco, sendo um impulso natural, não podia anular o direito civil adquirido por um título que lhe dei” (Machado, “19 de maio de 1888” 63). It would seem that the life of this ex-slave has not changed very much; only in title is there any difference.

The last paragraph of this *crônica* is quite illustrative of Machado’s overall criticism of the self-serving nature of politicians, who perform acts not because of any real desire to affect good in the world, but rather as a means of furthering their own political career. As he states:

O meu plano está feito; quero ser deputado, e, na circular que mandarei aos meus eleitores, direi que, antes, muito antes da abolição legal, já eu, em casa, na modéstia da família, libertava um escravo . . . que os homens puros, grandes e verdadeiramente políticos, não são os que obedecem à lei, mas os que se

antecipam a ela, dizendo ao escravo: *és livre*, antes que o digam os poderes públicos, sempre retardatários, trôpegos e incapazes de restaurar a justiça na terra, para satisfação do céu (Machado, “19 de maio de 1888” 64).

It is ironic that he emphasizes that he performed this act “well before” the passage of the law, when in reality it was mere days beforehand. As discussed in the previous chapter of this dissertation, behind every action there is always some underlying motivation that shows the doer’s own selfishness and, as we see in this chapter, the world of politics is particularly guilty of this sort of indulgence.

It would be wrong to state that the way in which this society was set up, the way in which everyone was conditioned to regard slaves and slavery, rested solely in the minds of the Whites. In the novel *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas*, the title character is out walking one day when he comes across one Black man beating another. Upon closer inspection Cubas discovers that the first man is Prudêncio, a freed slave that had once belonged to his father. Prudêncio had bought a slave for himself and now treated him in much the same way that he himself had been treated. Brás Cubas finds this situation quite fascinating, thinking to himself that it was, as he says, “um modo que o Prudêncio tinha de se desfazer das pancadas recebidas, – transmitindo-as a outro . . . [Ele] comprou um escravo, e ia-lhe pagando, com alto juro, as quantias que de mim recebera” (Machado, *Memórias póstumas* 101). Rather than trying to help out someone who is suffering the same fate he once held himself, this ex-slave chooses instead to identify with those in power, treating this unfortunate in the same way that he himself had been treated, in an effort to somehow balance out the cruelties of his own youth.

In reality, very few of Machado’s works directly address questions of slavery, a fact which serves to make those instances where this theme is prevalent all the more noteworthy and

forceful. The short story “Pai contra mãe” (1906) would be one such example. In this tale, a young man, Candinho, by nature well-meaning but lazy, finds that the only profession for which he has any sort of talent is that of slave hunter. He profits greatly from this exercise, and his personal life also flourishes, as he is soon married and expecting a child. However, due to his own efforts and those of other men who also seek to profit from the capture of runaway slaves, before long there is little work for him, and he faces the grim reality of having to give up his child for not being able to provide for it. He hears a report of a female slave having escaped, and tracks her down. She pleads for her life on the basis that she is pregnant, but all Candinho cares about is helping himself. He returns her to her master, who proceeds to beat her so severely that she ends up miscarrying.

Throughout the narrative, Machado adopts a tone of one who is quite oblivious to any thought of the wrongness of slavery. This however only makes his criticism that much deeper, as by using the words of such an ignorant voice he can make statements that are that much more resonant for the reader. For instance: “Há meio século, os escravos fugiam com frequência. Eram muitos, e nem todos gostavam da escravidão. Sucedia ocasionalmente apanharem pancada, e nem todos gostavam de apanhar pancada” (Machado, “Pai contra mãe” 466-7). One can see the surprise in the narrator’s tone at the thought that someone might actually not enjoy such a life, a train of thought not uncommon for the decades prior to abolition, the time period in which this story is set. Although not a naïve hero, we could make the argument that what we have here is a naïve narrator, who lacks a particular perspective of what he is saying that the reader is able to perceive.

The very end of the story contains what is perhaps the most shocking point in the narrative and shows quite clearly just the extent to which these characters did not regard slaves

as human. While returning to the plantation from which the female slave fled, Candinho berates her for getting pregnant and then running away, as if the former were her own decision when in fact it was her master who had been the cause. She fights with her captor the entire way, trying to save her and her child's life, to no avail. It is not clear whether it was her sheer terror at returning to her servitude or injuries sustained from Candinho's cruelty that caused her to abort, as Candinho did not stick around to find out the outcome. He returns to his own child, glad at its good health, and thinks to himself, "Nem todas as crianças vingam," (Machado, "Pai contra mãe" 475), effectively placing the blame for the slave child's death on its own inability to fight for its life. Candinho completely denies any involvement he himself may have had in the business.

Turning now to the United States, in the writings of Mark Twain, one cannot discuss the question of slavery without referring to the novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, a work which has become canonical in American literature. This novel tells the tale of two fugitives – a runaway slave named Jim and the young boy who helps him escape. Huck Finn makes a significant personal journey throughout the course of the book, going from a young innocent, blindly accepting whatever his elders tell him about slaves, to realizing that most of what he had always believed was wrong.

Stephen Railton puts forth an intriguing analysis of what the question of race really meant for this novel:

But while the problem of slavery . . . is central to *Huck Finn*, Twain is not primarily interested in what the institution of slavery was like for slaves, but in what it means, ideologically, to society as a whole, and in how it can be used, metaphorically, to explore the way ideology itself operates on human

consciousness. Can Huck help free Jim? That is the question on which the plot will essentially turn as the two runaways travel downriver on the raft. But hidden in that is the novel's deepest thematic question: can Jim help free Huck? (57).

By accompanying this runaway on his journey to freedom, and putting his own life and reputation on the line, Huck must face the ideas that society has always impressed upon him as being the only way to think and live; in this way, he will have to come to terms with his own perceptions and find some way to reconcile them within himself.

Although not from the text of this work, there is a sentiment expressed by Twain when referring to his own childhood that aptly sums up Huck's early life-views regarding slavery. As Twain said:

Training and association can accomplish strange miracles sometimes. In my schoolboy days I had no aversion to slavery. I was not aware that there was anything wrong about it. The local paper said nothing against it. The local pulpit taught us that God approved of it, that it was a holy thing, and the doubter need only look in the Bible if he wished to settle his mind. And then the texts were read aloud to us to make the matter sure. If there were passages in the Bible which disapproved of slavery, they were not quoted by our pastors (*Mark Twain Tonight*).

Since *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* takes place around the same time as when Twain was a boy, it stands to reason that these sentiments could be applied to this protagonist. It certainly fits in with the feelings Huck expresses throughout the course of the novel. The emotional journey that this young boy will take in terms of how he comes to re-evaluate what he was taught can be summed up by Mandia: "Huck is impressed by society's values which appear to be good



to him because the people in authority espouse them, but all the while the reader realizes that in reality Huck's own values, even though he is not confident in them, are far nobler" (35-6). This also refers back to the idea of the "naïve narrator," a device intentionally – and effectively – employed by Twain in this work.

Huck's father exemplifies the sort of extreme ignorance and prejudice that was felt by many living in the slave-holding states of early nineteenth-century America. In one diatribe against the "govment," he bemoans the fact that a freed Black was given the opportunity to vote:

There was a free nigger there from Ohio – a mulatter, most as white as a white man . . . They said he could VOTE when he was at home . . . Thinks I, what is the country a-coming to? It was election day, and I was just about to go and vote myself if I weren't too drunk to get there; but when they told me there was a State in this country where they'd let that nigger vote, I drew out (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 238).

Pap is incensed at the very idea that a former slave would be given the right to vote or would strive to better himself in society (Pap mentions that this man was a professor and had a gold watch and chain). Twain shows the irony of this situation in that Pap, without education, a job, or any sort of ambition, and possessing only a twisted sense of entitlement, still considers himself superior to another solely based along racial lines.

Huck's own learned racism is much more subtle, and very ingenuous. He is constantly surprised to find that Jim possesses the same emotions that he himself does. For instance, during their voyage on the raft, Huck would note Jim's moments of sadness, explaining it thusly: "He was thinking about his wife and children, away up yonder, and he was low and homesick; because he hadn't ever been away from home before in his life; and I do believe he cared just as

much for his people as white folks does for their'n. It don't seem natural, but I reckon it's so" (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 354). Huck is genuinely surprised that Jim possesses the same sort of emotional depth that he himself does, that he can in fact feel sadness and love towards his family just as a White person can. Railton remarks on the origin of this disbelief – "The habits of Huck's mind as conditioned by the social environment of the slave-owning village are deeply racist" (62). The key term here is "conditioned," as everything Huck believes is what he has been taught by his society. However, as this young boy gets to know this runaway slave, he begins to see him as a person and not merely as someone's property, thereby throwing doubts on his early training.

Huck, having been raised to believe that stealing and deceit were a sure ticket to Hell, finds himself at one point feeling so guilty about helping Jim to escape that he resolves to write to Miss Watson, Jim's owner, to let her know where her slave is. However, the days and weeks spent with Jim have so affected Huck that he cannot bring himself to send this man back to his old life. In one of the most climactic moments of the novel, Huck decides his fate: "I was a-trembling, because I'd got to decide, forever, betwixt two things, and I knowed it. I studied a minute, sort of holding my breath, and then says to myself: 'All right then, I'll GO to hell'—and tore it up" (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 409). He has made the conscious decision to risk his own soul in order not to betray the trust that Jim has in him.

In a later scene, in a line that bears a similarity to some of the sentiments expressed in "Pai contra mãe," Huck is recounting a fictional story to Tom Sawyer's Aunt Sally of a boat he was on which sustained damage. He describes what happened:

"It warn't the grounding – that didn't keep us back but a little. We blowed out a cylinder-head."

“Good gracious! anybody hurt?”

“No’m. Killed a nigger.”

“Well it’s lucky; because sometimes people do get hurt” (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 415).

Huck himself may have made the choice to view slaves as real people, but he realizes that in order not to be ostracized by his society, he has to continue to outwardly act like he had prior to his journey down the Mississippi.

The world of politics, whether dealing with those in power and the ways in which they manipulate the system, or the various policies that affect the lives of the nation, is ample fodder for criticism. As Gordon stated, “Comedy, in the nineteenth century, aimed at making us think” (128), and the political turmoil that was going on both in the United States and in Brazil during this period created an atmosphere in which satirists like Twain and Machado found much to discuss. By making their targets seem ridiculous, be they people or polemics such as war or slavery, these authors brought them to a humbler level, where readers could take a closer, critical look at what they accepted as being the way things were.

## CHAPTER 4: RELIGION – THE GREAT DRUGSTORE

*“O cristianismo é bom para as mulheres e os mendigos,  
e as outras religiões não valem mais do que essa:  
orçam todas pela mesma vulgaridade ou fraqueza.”*

*--Machado de Assis, Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas*

*“Religion consists in a set of things which the average man  
thinks he believes, and wishes he was certain.”*

*--Mark Twain, Notebook, 1879*

In “Letters from the Earth” (1909), Satan describes humanity thusly: “Many of these people have the reasoning faculty, but no one uses it in religious matters” (Twain 231). Instead they accept, often blindly, whatever is offered to them, changing their practices at a moment’s notice, and all the while worrying first and foremost about what others might think of them. As Twain said, referring to the great influx of new fads he witnessed, “The Christian’s Bible is a drug store. Its contents remain the same; but the medical practice changes” (“Bible Teaching” 107). And in fact Machado illustrates this in the *crônica* dated “5 de outubro de 1885,” in which the Devil, now deemed nonexistent by the newly-formed Spiritualism movement, states that there is no difference between calling him merely an idea of the past (and therefore no longer relevant) and using a new type of medicine to cure an old ailment, thereby rendering the old remedies useless. In this case, this “old ailment” refers metaphorically to the basic structure of Christian beliefs, with the “new medicine” being whatever new approach to worship has come into vogue. The treatment/practice may be different, but ultimately the contents/fundamental beliefs are the same.

As seen in previous chapters, hypocrisy in any form is perhaps the greatest human foible discussed in the works of both Machado de Assis and Mark Twain. Here I will turn to a more in-depth discussion of this trait as it concerns religion and religious practices. These inherent human contradictions will manifest themselves both internally, in terms of one’s personal behavior, as well as externally, in the way in which people interact, and can be seen in a variety of different contextual themes. Referring to Machado, but appropriate for Twain as well, John Gledson states that, “Machado was less interested in the doctrines themselves than in their practical results. Christianity is a very obvious case of a doctrine which from its idealistic origins has adjusted itself to a very imperfect world in ways which often do not command

respect” (*Deceptive Realism* 182), and it is this very contrast between the ideal and the real that will form the root of most of the arguments and examples of this chapter. To be discussed here: the idea of making promises one does not intend to keep; the importance placed on appearances; the inflated pomposity of the pious; those groups whose mission it was to help others, but who fell short of their goals; the idea of faith versus practice; the portrayal of canonical Biblical figures; the afterlife; and the idea of what effect an established church has on society.

Before proceeding, it is important to note the differences between the religious spheres in which each author lived, as well as their personal faiths. In simple terms, Machado lived in a predominantly Catholic society, with much history of syncretism, while Twain’s world was Protestant, and more specifically primarily Presbyterian. However, in spite of the high proportion of particular denominations, one finds that general tenets - whether traditionally part of the faith or not - are in fact very similar between the two societies.

The history of Catholicism in Brazil is unique from much of the rest of Latin America; a little-surprising fact given that the conquest and colonial periods themselves were vastly different between Portugal’s colony and those of Spain. As Professor Joseph A. Page discusses in his book *The Brazilians*, the history of this Church in Brazil “reflects the unique religiosity of the Brazilian people, and the interaction of this element of Brazilianness with Roman Catholicism” (322). He continues, commenting that: “Catholicism in Portugal’s prize colony tended to be nearly a continent wide and an inch deep” (324). In other words, though widespread, religion was largely remarkably superficial. Page then quotes Thomas C. Bruneau’s analysis of the situation, and concludes with his own thoughts:

“[T]he king was Catholic, therefore, so were all his subjects. With adherence to the religion guaranteed, not to say imposed, there was no need for the faithful to

develop a personal sense of commitment of belief.” This meant that the institutional Church became especially vulnerable to shifts in the political wind, and that religious conviction became similarly susceptible to the tug of unorthodoxy (324).

This lack of “commitment of belief” in turn leads to a more relaxed code when dealing with religion, as we shall see in many examples. Helen Caldwell corroborates Page’s comments, referring to this as the practice of doing “lip service to Catholicism, and with the customary rites, but [with] their real devotion . . . reserved for other gods” (168). These “other gods” may refer to such concepts as Capitalism or Economics, or indeed to deities from other faith systems. Due to its long history of importing African slaves, there was significant influence from religions such as Candomblé and Umbanda in Brazil, although I will not be entering into an analysis of this particular influence in this study. And, as mentioned in the introductory chapter, there were many new religious fads in vogue during Machado’s lifetime, such as Spiritualism, so this comment, though describing the situation in colonial times, was still very relevant during the nineteenth century.

Machado himself did not seem to have any religious inclinations. As critic Ivan Teixeira describes Machado’s views:

Machado de Assis . . . não acreditava em Deus nem na imortalidade da alma. Além de pessimista, era um cético. Para ele, Deus não cabe nos negócios humanos, nos quais o dinheiro e o prestígio social anulam toda e qualquer ação desinteressada e contemplativa. As relações diárias escarnecem da virtude e da boa fé (69).

It may seem noteworthy that Machado, a man who did not believe in God, could characterize human beliefs in such a similar manner as Twain, who had a much firmer faith; however, what it is that the two authors really have in common is the ability to portray society, a talent stemming from the paradoxical nature of the late nineteenth century, as we have already seen. For Machado, and for Twain as well, the presentation of religion in literature had a specific purpose, which we shall see in the examples in this chapter.

Twain's take on religion was colored by his own upbringing, namely in a Protestant community, as well as the general atmosphere of the United States of his day. As Lawrence I. Berkove and Joseph Csicsila discuss, "religion saturated American culture" (2). They go on to reference the politics of "manifest destiny" as well as popular cultural elements like "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," both ideas which combined religion with society. His early training was in Presbyterianism, although throughout his life he dedicated much time to the study of many of the other belief systems of the world. The particular brand of this denomination that his mother chose was, to put it mildly, rigorous. As biographer Ron Powers describes it: "Presbyterianism was the un-Transcendentalism of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. No sunny optimism in its tenets, no cheery vision of liberating faith built on the divinity within the personal soul" (29). It seems a small wonder that his work shows so much cynicism and pessimism. And, although he often criticizes organized religion, rather than turning his back on it, it does seem that he himself maintained a strong relationship with God:

In the long and grief-laced nights of his later years, even as he fulminated against a pitiless, depraved Christian God; brought Satan forward as a central figure in his tales; and secretly compiled the texts that would fully declare his apostasy after his death, Mark Twain seemed often to behave toward that God less like a



coldhearted nonbeliever than like a jilted lover. His torment was Job's torment, the transitory agony of one driven from the comforts of orthodox faith, who seeks a new faith system to fill the void (Powers 31).

Twain may have sought alternatives to what he had been raised to believe, but this is not to say that he ever abandoned it.

To that end, his analyses of other faiths frequently showed the effects of Protestantism; for example, he was very critical of the Catholic Church. Twain scholar Joe B. Fulton describes Twain's views on Catholicism: "it symbolized for him a 'pre-modern' world of universal tyranny, a world he understood from the sermons he heard in childhood against the Catholic menace" (23). It was not only this faith that received negative attention from Twain; he also spent much time criticizing what he termed "wildcat" religions. This expression comes from the profession of mining, in which a miner, hoping to strike it rich, would go away from the established vein of gold (or whatever mineral was being gathered) and attempt his own strike, more often than not ending up financially ruined. Twain applied this to religion:

Twain used the term 'wildcat' to burlesque religious practices that are anything other than what he views as traditional Protestantism . . . Through his extensive study of history, Twain achieved a deeper appreciation for the dangerous possibilities latent in all religion, but he most often focuses on the danger of the wildcats (Fulton 18-19).

As previously discussed in the introductory chapter, like in Machado, Twain aimed much of his satire at the "wildcat" of Spiritualism. In any event, although inclining towards his own heritage, what Twain most rallied against was the blind, mindless obedience to one's Church, as shall be discussed later in this chapter.

Turning to an analysis of the texts, hypocrisy is one of the most prevalent themes in the works of these two authors, and in terms of the questions of religion and religiosity, what they deal with is the great difference between what is said and what is done. What people claim they believe they should do does not always agree with their actual actions. And in many cases the individual's actions may in fact be more closely related to what society expects of them rather than their own personal beliefs; they attend church or engage in a particular tradition not because they necessarily believe in it, but because they would be hard-pressed to explain to their neighbor why they did *not* do it.

In Machado's works many of his characters would seem to be proponents of a rather controversial philosophical tenet – that of Pascal's Wager, put forth by French philosopher Blaise Pascal in the XVII century:

Pascal's Wager seeks to justify Christian faith by considering the various possible consequences of belief and disbelief in the God of Christianity. If we believe in the Christian God . . . then if he exists then we will receive an infinitely great reward in heaven while if he does not then we will have lost little or nothing. If we do not believe in the Christian God . . . then if he exists then we will receive an infinitely great punishment in hell while if he does not then we will have gained little or nothing . . . It is better to either receive an infinitely great reward in heaven or lose little or nothing than it is to either receive an infinitely great punishment in hell or gain little or nothing (Holt).

In effect, one who embraces this philosophy is covering all his bases, whatever he may truly believe.

In this vein, we will begin the textual analysis with one of Machado's most famous characters – Bento (Bentinho) Santiago, the protagonist of *Dom Casmurro*. As a youth, Bento's faith revolved around his social atmosphere (people of his class were expected to be good Christians), as well as the fact that his mother had promised to make him a priest and therefore he was expected to attend seminary school. In spite of this, one can see ways in which Bento's dealings with God were a bit lacking in sincerity. As a child, Bentinho had a habit of asking favors of God, promising a certain number of recitations of prayer in exchange. However, regardless of the outcome, he never actually got around to fulfilling his promise. The number of prayers owed increased, until they numbered in the thousands: "Era um modo de peitar a vontade divina pela quantia das orações . . . Mas vão lá matar a preguiça de uma alma que a trazia do berço e não a sentia atenuada pela vida!" (*Dom Casmurro* 49). He went through the motions of offering these devotions because it was what he was supposed to do, but he did not feel strongly enough to actually carry them out.

However, following along Pascal's reasoning, rather than completely abandoning his religious training in favor of his preferred lazy lifestyle, Bento kept himself Christian at least in name, so as to hedge his bets, however unconsciously, for salvation (or at the very least, for public acceptance). Or, as Caldwell states, "The moral fiber of this society was on a par with its religious practices – not conspicuously vicious but frivolous, foolish, contemptuous of its heritage, and not averse to the practice of dishonesty" (168). In this way Bento saw nothing wrong with his actions.

This idea also appears in the short story "Entre santos" (1886) in which the statues of various saints displayed in a church come alive at night and talk to each other about the people who come to pray for favors. One of these people is a man whose wife is very sick, and, having

given up on the ability of doctors to help, he decides to try another course: “Desesperando da terra, voltou-se para Deus” (Machado, “Entre santos” 389). This day is one of the very few in which he has entered the church, and one can see his inexperience in prayer by the way in which his mind works as he makes his plea: “Sales teve uma idéia específica de usurário, a de prometer uma perna de cera. Não foi o crente, . . . foi o usurário que pensou em forçar a graça divina pela expectativa de lucro . . . [D]espender é documentar: só se quer de coração aquilo que se paga a dinheiro” (Machado, “Entre santos” 389). This man, Sales, begs for divine intervention, but when it comes to making the promise he had planned, the wax leg, he hesitates, thinking of how much it will cost. He finally resolves to promise, instead of any offering that would cost him financially, to say a certain number of *padre-nossos* and *ave-marias*. He begins by promising three hundred, but quickly the number rises to one thousand.

The saints are very amused by this, that this man, though hesitant to tender anything that would diminish his precious fortune, will not act so cheaply when it comes to a less tangible offering. One can see this in a segment from the dialogue between the saints: “- Ao menos, tem alguma religião, ponderou S. José. [S. Francisco respondeu] - Alguma tem, mas vaga e econômica” (Machado, “Entre Santos” 390). This suppliant, though earnestly wishing to help cure his wife, cannot let go of his own greed, showing how for him, religion is “vague and economic,” and only to be turned to in the most dire of cases. Like Bento, he decides that the best course of action is to promise something that cannot truly be quantified or accounted for. Religion in the end becomes something to be utilized to suit one’s own ends, whether it is to pray for a particular favor as we have seen here or to show others that one is devout, a cynical theme which also frequently occurs in Machado’s work.

This latter reason, the wish for public approval, can be seen in many cases in both of these writers. In *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas* the primary female character, Virgília, only goes to church on special occasions: “Virgília era um pouco religiosa. Não havia missa aos domingos, é verdade, e creio que até só ia às igrejas em dia de festa, e quando havia lugar vago em alguma tribuna. Mas rezava todas as noites com fervor, ou, pelo menos, com sono” (Machado 87). The title character sees this woman’s religious fortitude as one of her virtues, in spite of the fact that it was not in reality all that strong. For Machado, this situation could be applied to the majority of society as it is a frequent theme in his literature.

In Twain’s story *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* there is a chapter which takes place in church during a typical Sunday service. The narrator (who is omniscient and not an active participant in the story although he does speak in first person) describes the hush that falls over the congregation when the service is about to start: “[it was] broken only by the tittering and whispering of the choir in the gallery. The choir always tittered and whispered all through service. There was once a church choir that was not ill-bred, but I have forgotten where it was” (Twain, *Tom Sawyer* 38). Here we see the church’s importance as much as a place for social gathering as for worship, as well as the extremely commonplace nature of this sort of “ill-bred” behavior. A bit further on, the minister is preaching: “The minister . . . droned along monotonously through an argument that was so prosy that many a head by and by began to nod – and yet it was an argument that dealt in limitless fire and brimstone and thinned the predestined elect down to a company so small as to be hardly worth the saving” (Twain, *Tom Sawyer* 40). Once again the Church is treated as a social obligation, where, in spite of the fact that most of the people were not actively paying attention to what was going on, they would have been loathe not to attend. One could also note the apparently commonplace nature of the sermon itself – in spite

of its promises of “fire and brimstone” no one was paying much attention. Huckleberry Finn also comments on this lack of desire to frequent services in his book, here describing an empty church during the week: “there warn’t anybody at the church, except maybe a hog or two, for there warn’t any lock on the door, and hogs like a puncheon floor in summer-time because it’s cool. If you notice, most folks don’t go to church only when they’ve got to; but a hog is different” (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 172).

In terms of the social importance of being seen, it is worth considering two examples from Machado that deal with the appearances associated with funerals, both from the novel *Esau e Jacó*. Early in the story, there is a brief description of a mass given for a man who had died. In spite of his years of dedication to his job and his overall good demeanor, no one was interested in attending his funeral: “Não se sabendo quem mandava dizer a missa, ninguém lá foi. A igreja escolhida deu ainda menos relevo ao ato” (Machado, *Esau e Jacó* 22). It was not until a wealthy couple appeared in an ornate carriage that anyone paid attention to the proceedings.

Towards the end of the novel, when the love interest of the two main characters dies, we see another example of the pomp given to funerary rites. She had died young, unmarried, and for that reason did not receive as grand a spectacle as she otherwise might have: “Mas que ninguém fosse seu marido, foi uma espécie de consolação. Houve mais; supondo que ela o tivesse aceitado e casassem, pensava agora no esplêndido enterro que lhe faria” (Machado, *Esau e Jacó* 177). Here the death rites combine with the image of a woman’s place in society; a married woman would be more entitled to a fancy interment than an unmarried one. The inherent hypocrisy here is that those of means and those who fit best within society’s guidelines receive the best treatment, regardless of what Christianity might teach about treating all people as equals.

In *Dom Casmurro* we see a different take on the importance of appearances, this time with a priest who has been honored with a rise in station. Padre Cabral was promoted to the title of *protonotário apostólico*, and went to celebrate with Bento and his family who were great friends. Everyone rejoiced in his good fortune, although they did not fully understand what it meant: “era a primeira vez que [o título] soava aos nossos ouvidos . . . [M]as que era *protonotário apostólico*?” (Machado, *Dom Casmurro* 78-9). Apparently not even Cabral knew, as he responded that “não era propriamente o cargo da curia, mas as honras dele” (Machado, *Dom Casmurro* 79). The chapter gets more and more ridiculous as this inflated title is repeated over and over by each person; however none of them would have characterized it as such: “Cabral ouvia com gosto a repetição do título” (Machado, *Dom Casmurro* 79). It is all about appearances and the way in which one is viewed by others; the mere fact that this title sounded fancy and impressive was enough to elevate Cabral in everyone’s eyes. One should not conclude that he was somehow unworthy of their estimation, however it is important to point out the pomposity of the situation. This title is in fact real, a Papal rank that dates back to Ancient Rome where the clergy held political power (“Monsenhor”).

Hypocrisy, particularly regarding religious matters, takes many forms. Each author portrays a group of people whose mission in life is to help others, yet whose actual actions at times contradict this belief. Turning again to *Esaú e Jacó*, we meet a man who is out collecting alms for the poor. Natividade, rejoicing at her own good fortune, gives him more money than he has ever seen. However, rather than sharing this wealth with the people he represents, he chooses to keep it:

Na igreja, ao tirar a opa, depois de entregar a bacia ao sacristão, ouviu uma voz débil como de almas remotas que lhe perguntavam se os dois mil-réis . . . Os dois

mil-réis, dizia outra vez menos débil, eram naturalmente dele, que, em primeiro lugar, também tinha alma, e, em segundo lugar, não recebera nunca tão grande esmola. Quem quer dar tanto vai à igreja ou compra uma vela, não põe assim uma nota na bacia de esmolas pequenas (Machado, *Esau e Jacó* 21).

He is able to justify his action to himself, but it is doubtful that anyone else would take such a relaxed view, particularly those whom the money was meant to benefit.

Coming from the other perspective, the giving of money to the poor can also be a selfish endeavor (relating back to the discussion in chapter two on the non-existence of purely altruistic acts). In *Dom Casmurro*, Bento, in the midst of a complicated plot that would extract him from his seminary studies and allow him to marry his childhood sweetheart, comes across a beggar. He gives him some money, but the motivation behind it has nothing to do with a wish for this unfortunate to be able to buy food:

Ao portão do Passeio, um mendigo estendeu-nos a mão. José Dias passou adiante, mas eu pensei em Capitu e no seminário, tirei dois vinténs do bolso e dei-os ao mendigo. Este beijou a moeda; eu pedi-lhe que rogasse a Deus por mim, a fim de que eu pudesse satisfazer todos os meus desejos.

--Sim, meu devoto!

--Chamo-me Bento, acrescentei para esclarecê-lo (Machado, *Dom Casmurro* 61).

The last two pieces of dialogue are the most telling of this episode, with their irony of first the beggar referring to Bento as “devout,” a description which he does not in fact deserve; second, the fact that in order to guarantee his success, Bento feels the need to make sure that the beggar knows his name, perhaps in order to better ensure that God, upon hearing the prayer, knows exactly whom to assist. John Gledson comments on this aspect of Bento’s personality:



What Machado is doing is showing thought operating, not at an abstract philosophical level, but within a given social and psychological environment and as a function of that environment. More specifically, he shows how Christianity . . . can, in spite of its instruction to love one's neighbor, adjust itself to the self-centeredness and contempt for others that in fact characterize Bento (*Deceptive Realism* 163-4).

Perhaps he is not completely contemptuous here, but Bento certainly is selfish in his actions, always putting his own wants ahead of anyone else.

In Twain's writing one finds a similar treatment of another group whose purpose is to help those around them but who ultimately fall short of this goal – that of the foreign missionary. Frequently this author's discussions of these people are very scathing indeed, and criticize forcefully the strong-armed tactics employed by them. In his essay "The Missionary in World-Politics," Twain poses a letter to the editor in which he discusses the inherent flaws of this profession. He starts with the simple – and cynical – statement, "I do not know why we respect missionaries" (Twain, "Missionary" 103), and then goes on to posit various hypotheses:

Perhaps it is because they have not intruded here from Turkey or China or Polynesia to break our hearts by sapping away our children's faith and winning them to the worship of alien gods. We have lacked the opportunity to find out how a parent feels to see his child deriding and blaspheming the religion of his ancestors. We have lacked the opportunity of hearing a foreign missionary who has been forced upon us against our will lauding his own saints and gods and saying harsh things about ours. If, some time or other, we shall have these

experiences, it will probably go hard with the missionary (Twain, “Missionary” 104).

As discussed in chapter three with the short story “The War Prayer,” what Twain accomplishes here is to approach the issue from the other perspective; a practice not in vogue among the more devout members of his society. These seemingly most virtuous of Christians, who take the risk of traveling abroad in order to spread their faith, end up creating hostile environments with their heavy-handed practices. As he states toward the end of the essay, “If there had been no missionaries in China would there be any trouble there to-day? I believe not” (Twain, “Missionaries” 108). One could argue that proselytizing is an important part of Christianity, but the point being made here is that while preaching a doctrine of compassion and acceptance, these people were doing anything but – imposing their own lifestyles on others regardless of how it might forever alter the others’ society.

Returning to the discussion of the paradoxical nature of faith versus practice, we see a more extreme example in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*. At one point the narrator Hank Morgan describes the people of Camelot in this way: “I will say this much for the nobility: that, tyrannical, murderous, rapacious and morally rotten as they were, they were deeply and enthusiastically religious . . . More than once I had seen a noble who had gotten his enemy at a disadvantage, stop to pray before cutting his throat” (82). The juxtaposition of elements here is striking – Morgan ironically praises the religious fervor of these people while at the same time condemning their otherwise savage lifestyle.

Concerning the theme of savagery in spite of supposedly Christian leanings, it is worth noting Twain’s descriptions of people’s behavior in regards to their religious practices. One can encapsulate Twain’s theory on spiritual hypocrisy in these sentences:

Man is . . . the Religious Animal. He is the only Religious Animal. He is the only animal that has the True Religion – several of them. He is the only animal that loves his neighbor as himself, and cuts his throat if his theology isn't straight. He has made a graveyard of the globe in trying his honest best to smooth his brother's path to happiness and heaven (Twain, "Man's Place" 157).

Twain's commentary concerns the dichotomy between what is said, that holy doctrines teach that we should love our fellow man; and what is done, the reality in which many people have killed and been killed in God's name.

In this same essay, "Man's Place in the Animal World," a purported scientific treatise entailing great observation and analysis of people compared to animals, the narrator describes an "experiment" conducted in which he first placed various animals, natural enemies, together in a cage to see if they could learn to be friends. It worked very well, so he then decided to modify his experiment and try with people. Here is the experiment and the results:

[I]n another cage I confined an Irish Catholic from Tipperary, and as soon as he seemed tame I added a Scotch Presbyterian from Aberdeen. Next a Turk from Constantinople; a Greek Christian from Crete; an Armenian; a Methodist from the wilds of Arkansaw; a Buddhist from China; a Brahmin from Benares. Finally, a Salvation Army colonel from Wapping. Then I stayed away two whole days. When I came back to note results, the cage of Higher Animals [cat, dog, goose, fox, etc.] was all right, but in the other there was but a chaos of gory odds and ends of turbans and fezzes and plaids and bones and flesh – not a specimen left alive. These Reasoning Animals had disagreed on a theological detail and carried the matter to a Higher Court (Twain, "Man's Place" 158).

The animals, the cats, dogs, etc., may not have been “Reasoning Animals” like people are, but even so were more able to comport themselves in a civilized manner. As previously discussed, Twain comments frequently on this conceited idea of humanity possessing a so-called “Moral Sense” which makes it superior to creatures that were less evolved, at least in terms of sentience. As he puts it, the real curse of humanity is this same feeling of moral superiority: “the ability to *do* evil; for there can be no evil act without the presence of consciousness of it in the doer of it” (Twain, “Man’s Place” 159). This idea will be seen again in Twain’s portrayal of the Biblical story of the Fall.

Each of these authors has at various times written works that re-write traditional religious stories, most notably those of the Old Testament. The important thing to remember here though, as mentioned in the introductory chapter, is that when dealing with parody, it is not necessarily the story itself, or the faith it pertains to, that is being criticized. Relating to Twain’s use of parody, but highly relevant to Machado’s style as well, Joe B. Fulton describes it thus: “Clearly, Twain parodies the sacred text, but uses it as a vehicle for social criticism, rather than as the recipient of that criticism . . . One sees here that *parodia sacra*, the parody of sacred texts, is infused with a carnival sensibility, a spirit of topsy-turvy that debases the elevated for the purposes, as Bahktin suggests, of ‘renewal’” (4-5). Tales which are so much a part of social consciousness were rarely looked at from a contemporary point of view, but it is exactly this that Machado and Twain attempt, forging links between canonical parts of spiritual history and the way in which society is constructed in modern contexts. As we shall see, there are definite and clear messages and motives behind these parodic writings.

Both Machado and Twain have written works that deal with the Biblical story of Adam and Eve. Each retells it in his own way, creating a more complete narration of the incidents that

make up the tale. By in a very real sense reinventing one of the oldest foundations of Christian mythology, these two authors force their readers to look beyond the traditional lessons of humanity's fall from grace to see the modern day human lessons that can be learned from it.

In his short story "Adão e Eva" (1885) Machado portrays a group of society friends having dinner together. The talk turns to a discussion of male versus female curiosity, leading the party-goers to debate whether the fault for mankind's expulsion from Paradise really belongs with Adam or with Eve. Sr. Veloso, a judge, declines to weigh in, saying that the story as such cannot be analyzed, as it is not entirely accurate. He then tells his version, in which the serpent's attempt to convince the two to eat of the forbidden fruit is unsuccessful. God is so impressed by Adam and Eve's loyalty that he raises them to Heaven, leaving the Earth to the Devil and his animal creations.

The temptations used by the serpent are in effect a listing of some of mankind's greatest achievements and most notable figures. It tells Eve that she will be the progenitor of such people as Cleopatra and Mary of Nazareth. Science and progress will flourish under this new humanity. However, Adam and Eve rebuke this, saying that "nada valia a perda do paraíso, nem a ciência, nem o poder, nenhuma outra ilusão da terra" (Machado, "Adão e Eva" 363). In other words, the accomplishments that people hold most dear in fact run counter to man's true purpose.

The other guests at the party are understandably a bit perturbed by this story, as it defies their most basic beliefs. The story could not have happened like that, and shame on the judge for having suggested this version. It is ironic that they were so offended by the thought of a happier ending, since in most analyses of this story people are quick to judge these two original people as having condemned the human race by their action. In the last lines of the story the judge concludes that perhaps he was in error: "Pensando bem, creio que nada disso aconteceu; mas

também . . . se tivesse acontecido, não estaríamos aqui saboreando este doce, que está na verdade, uma coisa primorosa” (Machado, “Adão e Eva” 364). Herein lies Machado’s real point – there is no sense in trying to lay blame in this case, as life as we know it could never have happened had it occurred any differently. And, more to the point, we would not truly *want* it to have ended differently. This paradox between what people claim to want and what they truly desire will appear again in Twain’s descriptions of Heaven.

These Biblical figures also appear in Twain’s works – “Extracts from Adam’s Diary” (1904) and “Eve’s Diary” (1906) also published together as *The Diaries of Adam and Eve*. Here we have a narrative of life before, during, and after the Fall, told in their own words by the two people who were there. Twain also presents a justification for the events of this story occurring as they did. In Adam’s account, he reprimands Eve for becoming too curious about the Tree of Knowledge, saying that eating of its fruit would bring death into the world. Eve, already concerned about the fate of certain animals who were clearly not designed for eating vegetables, finds this idea appealing: “she could save the sick buzzard, and furnish fresh meat to the despondent lions and tigers” (Twain, “Extracts” 556). Like in the argument made by Machado’s judge, here we see that in order for the world to have come to be as it is, certain sacrifices had to be made.

On a more religious note, at least in terms of the common practices of Christianity, there is a brief commentary about the way in which people are meant to spend their time. One journal entry of Adam’s, written on a Sunday, states: “Pulled through. This day is getting to be more and more trying. It was selected and set apart last November as a day of rest. I already had six of them per week, before” (Twain, “Extracts” 550). In a later entry, made after the Fall, one can see he has had a change of heart: “I have come to like Sunday myself . . . There ought to be more

Sundays. In the old days they were tough, but now they come handy” (Twain, “Extracts” 560). What is being pointed out here is that this particular custom would have made no sense had Adam and Eve not been expelled and forced to work for a living.

In other writings, Twain comes to the conclusion that it is in fact unfair to condemn these progenitors of humanity for their actions, as they, being completely ingenuous creatures, really had no way to know what the punishment for their transgression truly entailed. In “Passage from Satan’s Diary” (pub. 1923), the serpent is talking with Eve about the ridiculous nature of her being required to show obedience to God (or indeed anyone). As he states, “you have no idea of duty, command, obedience, they have no meaning for you . . . It is impossible for you to do wrong, for you have no more notion of right and wrong than the other animals have . . . No one can do wrong without knowing how to distinguish *between* right and wrong” (Twain, “Satan’s Diary” 65-6). So therefore, prior to gaining wisdom from the Tree of Knowledge, it was useless to forbid Adam and Eve of eating of its fruit; not knowing what death was, telling them that their disobedience would bring it into the world had no meaning. Twain takes this one step further, solidly placing the blame in God’s hands: “From often shockingly heretical perspectives, Twain preached all his life in his literature a distinct departure from a conventional Christian message: that *because of God’s malice* life is deceitful and humans are not meant to achieve in it their dearest goals of freedom, happiness, and fulfillment” (Berkove 1-2).

These characters are not the only Biblical figures to make their way into nineteenth century literature. Machado has another short story, entitled “Na arca,” which chronicles the manner in which Noah’s sons pass the time on the Ark waiting for the waters to recede. Since they would now be the only people on the Earth, they decided that they should come to an agreement about how to divide up the land. They end up in a brutal fight, throwing punches and

trying to involve their wives and father. Noah arrives on the scene, infuriated: “Erguei-vos, homens indignados da salvação e merecedores do castigo que feriu os outros homens” (Machado, “Na arca” 36). He points out the irony of the situation – Noah and his family had been selected to re-populate the Earth based on their moral superiority over all others, and yet, with the entire world to spread out in, his sons act out against each other with the very vices God was trying to eradicate. What Machado is pointing out here is that ultimately, human nature is constant, and any attempt to change it is completely fruitless.

Taking this discussion of religious figures to the other end of the spectrum, we go from Biblical progenitors and heroic figures to the one figure most often vilified – that of the Devil. However, neither of these authors personifies him in what may be called a “traditional” manner, in other words, as the origin of all the world’s ills and the figure that represents evil incarnate. Instead of this, the Devil becomes a way to point out the inconsistencies of human beings, in terms of their treatment of others, as well as their understanding of their spiritual lives; this of course refers back to the idea of the *parodia sacra*, in which the matter being employed is rarely that which is truly the object of criticism.

In the novel *Dom Casmurro*, Bento relates how he once got a lesson on life and the universe by an Italian singer who equated the creation of the world to an opera. In this narrative, Satan’s fall comes about because he planned a rebellion in order to be able to play his own version of the songs created by the angels. He takes with him to Hell a libretto for an opera that had been written by God, and, in an effort to regain favor, sets about putting music to it. God initially resists this new work, but finally consents to having it played: “Deus, cansado e cheio de misericórdia, consentiu em que a ópera fosse executada, mas fora do céu. Criou um teatro especial, e inventou uma companhia inteira, com todas as partes, primárias e comprimárias,



coros e bailarinos” (Machado, *Dom Casmuro* 25). As one can see, the Earth itself is a creation of the Devil, used as a way in which to ingratiate himself to the being who cast him out of Heaven. This does not seem to bode well for the human race, whose Christians like to imagine themselves as singular creations of God. One could infer from this that Machado viewed the human race as essentially flawed, as it combines elements from both Heaven, the libretto, and Hell, the music. And in fact, as Gledson puts it, these are not in equal proportions: “Any good intentions will inevitably be distorted by the nature of humanity itself, just as God’s words are drowned by Satan’s music” (*Deceptive Realism* 174).

This is not the only instance in which the creation of the Earth is attributed to Satan. In “Adão e Eva” the judge announces, “não foi Deus que criou o mundo, foi o Diabo” (Machado 360). He goes on to describe how the work itself was done by the Devil, with God merely making any necessary corrections in order to better the lot of mankind. One such element is the creation of light, giving rise to the first day. The two worked together – the Devil creating abysses and hurricanes, God creating flowers and warm breezes. Again we see Machado’s view that Satan had a definite hand in the evolution and dissemination of life on this planet.

In the short story “A Igreja do diabo” (1883) the Devil again seeks to meddle with the lives of men, this time though as the creator of a new religion rather than of the world itself. The basic storyline is that the Devil decides to found his own Church. The reason for this decision is that, over the centuries, many people have followed him, but without direction or doctrine: “[O Diabo] vivia . . . dos remanescentes divinos, dos descuidos e obséquios humanos. Nada fixo, nada regular. Por que não teria ele a sua igreja? Uma igreja do Diabo era o meio eficaz de combater as outras religiões, e destruí-las de uma vez” (Machado, “A Igreja” 141). The proposed destruction of other religions is not so much intended to show the evil of the Devil, but

rather to point out how easy it would be to abolish other theologies. And so it happens in the story – people are so intrigued by the new religion that it is successful the world over.

This success stems from the Devil's fundamental precept – that of negation. Machado does not present this character with ill-intent, but merely acting upon the fundamental nature of human beings: “Senhor, eu sou, como sabeis, o espírito que nega . . . Nego tudo” (Machado, “A Igreja” 144). It is this atmosphere in which people find their desired life: “A doutrina era a que podia ser na boca de um espírito de negação” (Machado, “A Igreja” 145). According to this doctrine, no one had to worry about their neighbors, everyone had simply to act for themselves. As the Devil instructed, “Com efeito, o amor do próximo era um obstáculo grave à nova instituição . . . [E]ssa regra era uma . . . invenção de parasitas e negociantes insoláveis” (Machado, “A Igreja” 147). This Church was so successful because the truth is, according to Machado, that humans are inherently egotistical, and whenever possible prefer to think only of their own concerns (this refers back to the discussion of *Humanitas* presented in chapter two).

However, at the end of the story, the Devil notices a change – some people had returned, clandestinely, to their old religious ideas, helping others and acting in a more humanitarian fashion. When the Devil goes to God to ask about this strange development, He responds, “Que queres tu? É a eterna contradição humana” (Machado, “A Igreja” 149). Gledson comments that “evil can never be the ‘official’ ruler of the world, can never organize a ‘Church’; its nature is to remain secondary, without rational or moral justification, even unrecognized. In that position, it can rule all the more effectively” (*Deceptive Realism* 171). Which in effect it did, for a time, although ultimately people will get bored and move on to the next idea that presents itself. We return to the idea of the pharmacy mentioned earlier, in which although the products change, the purposes behind them never do. What this short story shows about humanity is that while there

always exists this mania to adopt the newest fads, intrinsic concepts and beliefs, such as the desire to have some structure to one's faith and practices regardless of what those structures are, will always remain the same.

When Machado speaks of the Devil, he always refers to him as such, "Devil (*Diabo*)."  
Contrary to this, Twain almost always calls him "Satan." This distinction is important, because it shows that Twain feels more intimacy with this character, and does not regard him solely in terms of his historical personification. For Machado, the Devil is merely a symbol, an archetypal figure; for Twain, he is a real person. The ways in which this American author treats Satan vary from a simple sinner to the most influential creature in all of human history.

In the story "Letters from the Earth," Twain deviates from traditional Biblical history and shows Satan as one of God's angels who, due to his habit of speaking too frankly, was punished with exile on Earth for a millennium. From there he sent letters back to the other angels, describing these strange creatures that God had created, human beings. Here, Twain uses the voice of Satan, an outside observer of humanity, to make his critiques. He discusses various aspects of earthly life, but a brief and ironic summary of humans can be found in this commentary: "Man is a marvelous curiosity. When he is at his very best he is a sort of low-grade nickel-plated angel; at his worst he is unspeakable, unimaginable; and first and last and all the time he is a sarcasm. Yet he blandly and in all sincerity calls himself the 'noblest work of God'" (Twain, "Earth" 221). Human beings are incapable of seeing their own flaws, and therefore consider themselves superior to all other creatures on Earth. Only a character who does not have a personal interest, like Satan, could note something so basic and fundamental.

Twain also has, or at least claims to have, a profound respect for such a controversial figure. However, it is not a positive respect. As Twain says, "During those 1500 years the fear

of Satan and Hell made 99 Christians where love of God and Heaven landed *one*” (Twain, “Letters” 169). Also:

We may not pay him reverence, for that would be indiscreet, but we can at least respect his talents. A person who has for untold centuries maintained the imposing position of spiritual head of four-fifths of the human race, and political head of the whole of it, must be granted possession of executive abilities of the loftiest order (Twain, “Concerning” 174—5).

The element of parody enters here in an inverted sense to the previous discussion, because what Twain appears to do is laud Satan, but in actuality uses him to point out how the characteristics he represents – egotism, vice, fraud – are an integral part of human society. He uses irony here as well, in that his comments on Satan being “spiritual head of four-fifths of the human race” refers to the fact that every religion teaches that it is the only true one, therefore any others are against God. Comparing such a negative figure with humanity is a strong way to make his social criticism.

Twain uses the voice of the Devil as a means of commenting on humanity by use of an outside observer. Machado does this as well in his novel *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas*, only here from the perspective of a deceased narrator, as discussed in the chapter on Hypocrisy. The two are outside of human life, and for this reason have a clearer view, less hindered by any form of predisposition or inclination in relation to the actions of people. Brás is, as he says, a “defunto autor,” different from an “autor defunto” because instead of being an author who happens to have died, he died before beginning to write. There is a unique advantage here; as Brás Cubas comments, “a franqueza é a primeira virtude de um defunto . . . não há nada tão incomensurável como o desdém dos finados” (*Memórias Póstumas* 55).

This novel does not delve into much discussion of the afterlife itself; one might merely see a man talking about his life without taking undue notice of the fact that the first few chapters are about his death. There are no sad overtones here, no tragic reference to what has occurred.

As Helen Caldwell states it:

Although he thus insists on his pessimism, his manner is far from pessimistic. He is about as carefree a corpse as one is likely to come across. Even the worm of his dedication, that is, death (perhaps his critics also), is patted on the back, so to speak, with a certain camaraderie, and one suspects that Braz's tomb was a snug affair with hot and cold running water and a good library (85).

Not an unpleasant description, but also not one that conforms well to the ideals of Paradise embraced by most people.

An interesting aspect of the world of the dead as depicted by Machado is that he almost never speaks of the afterlife or of Heaven. In the book of *Brás Cubas*, we never see the transition between terrestrial life and that which follows; the protagonist seems to exist only as an external observer, writing his memoirs as a way to pass the time. In "A igreja do diabo," we have a brief image of Heaven, but we see no people there – only God and the Devil in conversation. In fact, the Devil speaks of how one of the reasons for the widespread popularity of his Church is due to the fact that it is so difficult to get into Heaven – people desist from behaving themselves as a means of reaching a heavenly reward, as he says, "por causa do preço, que é alto" ("A igreja" 142). This shows how Machado believes that, for humanity as it was in his time, it would have been exceedingly difficult to enter Heaven, this perhaps being a reason for his not addressing this theme much in his literature, or at the very least only treating it ironically.

By contrast, one can find much discussion on the Afterlife in Twain's writings, again in a way meant to illustrate the fact that what people claim to believe does not often correspond with what they may truly want. When Mark Twain speaks of death, he includes a transition to a spiritual life. The commentary that he makes with his descriptions of Heaven centers on the idea that people do not actually know what the place should be like, or what it is they truly wish it to be. Two works that discuss this theme are the short stories "Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven" (1909) and "Letters from the Earth." In the first we listen to a deceased man describing how reality is very different from one's expectations, and in the second we see again the voice of Satan speaking of the illogical ideas of humanity.

In "Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven," the main character narrates what it was like when he died and went to Heaven. After a few episodes, he arrives in Paradise and meets another soul who has already been there for awhile. This person speaks to him about what everyone thinks when they first arrive:

People take the figurative language of the Bible . . . for literal, and the first thing they ask for when they get here is a halo and a harp . . . So they are outfitted with these things without a word. They go and sing and play just about one day, and that's the last you'll ever see of them in the choir. They don't need anyone to tell them that that sort of thing wouldn't make a heaven – at least not a heaven that a sane man could stand a week and remain sane (Twain, "Stormfield" 157-8).

All of the images that people associate with Heaven, like the halo or the harp, and the idea of passing all of one's time singing are not things that most people would actually want to do for all of eternity.

In “Letters from the Earth” the description of Heaven comes from the ideas of the people, which Twain points out as being very different from the actual place, although he never describes it. The Heaven invented by people and described by Satan, like that of Captain Stormfield, also contains souls singing and playing the harp. He finds this very bizarre, that a race that gives so much value to intelligence would invent such a concept: “This sincere adorer of intellect . . . has invented a religion and a heaven which pay no compliments to intellect . . . in fact, never even mentions it” (“Earth” 226). In “Man’s Place in the Animal World” Twain makes the same observation: “Even when he himself has imagined a heaven, he has never made provision in it for intellectual joys” (“Man’s Place” 162). For some reason, Twain comments, the values that are so much loved on Earth never enter into the version of Heaven that Christians have created.

Finally, Twain’s last critique of the perception of Heaven is related again to the hypocritical way in which people react to those of other faiths. As previously mentioned, there is a lot of discord among the various religious denominations regarding whose theology is right. But, one thing that they all preach is the idea that everyone is equal in the eyes of God. What Twain remarks is that no one would be satisfied upon arrival in Heaven and discovering people of other sects there. As he says, “What a hell of a heaven it will be when they get all these hypocrites assembled there” (Ayres 111). One might say that one likes all of humanity, but in reality this is not so, and, according to Twain, it is ridiculous that people believe they would be happy in an afterlife as such.

Continuing along this line, although a religious man himself, at least in terms of having a firm belief in God, Mark Twain nevertheless had problems with the existence of an Established Church which proclaimed itself the one true religion. He felt that there were many ways in

which one could show one's devotion, and the idea that anyone who did not prescribe to a given denomination or faith was automatically condemned to Hell was absurd. In reference to the Catholic Church, Fulton comments of its "visible connection with ancient observances and its historical involvement in politics" as well as the fact that Twain saw it as "a danger for political, religious, and mental freedom" (22). These ideas are particularly evident in the novel *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*.

Throughout the course of the work, Hank Morgan finds himself constantly battling the teachings and domination of the Catholic Church. Although a staunch Presbyterian, he resists the temptation to use his influence with the king to merely make this the primary religion:

I could have given my own sect the preference and made everybody a Presbyterian without any trouble, but that would have been to affront a law of human nature: spiritual wants and instincts are as various in the human family as are physical . . . and man is only at his best . . . when he is equipped with the religious garment whose color and shape and size most nicely accommodates themselves to the spiritual complexion, angularities, and stature of the individual who wears it (Twain, *Connecticut Yankee* 47).

This speech marks the beginning of the long fight Morgan would have with his fiercest opposition in his quest to modernize and "civilize" the world in which he now lives.

This character's (as well as the author's) main criticism involves the way in which the Established Church has taken the human race and distorted it into a rigid hierarchy, with itself among the highest echelons. As Morgan travels around the countryside talking with the commoners, he is amazed that the very idea of having a better terrestrial life had simply never crossed their minds: "it hadn't ever occurred to them that a nation could be so situated that every



man *could* have a say in the government” (Twain, *Connecticut Yankee* 64). His response was that he had seen such a government (referring to the United States), and that it would always be so as long as it did not have its own Established Church.

Morgan sums up the great force of the Church in this way, necessarily referring to the Catholic Church as the power of the day, but really his thoughts could be applied to any religious ruling body:

In two or three centuries it had converted a nation of men to a nation of worms.

Before the day of the Church’s supremacy in the world, men were men, and held their heads up . . . and what of greatness and position a person got, he got mainly by achievement, not by birth. But then the Church came to the front, with an ax to grind . . . she invented “divine right of kings,” and propped it all around

(Twain, *Connecticut Yankee* 39).

Essentially, in Twain’s view, the Church was the entity most responsible for the stratified way in which society evolved over the centuries.

Twain did not focus all of his criticism on Catholicism. He blamed Established Churches in general for the majority of atrocities committed throughout history. In his essay “The Second Advent” (1881), he tells the story of a second Nativity, placing this birth of Christ in nineteenth century Arkansas. When the people come to worship the newborn, they place before him various gifts, records of the history of Christianity since his last visit to Earth. They all possess titles such as “a History of the Church’s Dominion During the First Fourteen Centuries” and “A History of the Salem Witchcraft.” They also present to him some small toys – models of instruments of torture from the Inquisition. These people were very proud of their

“achievements,” not realizing all of the pain and suffering caused by the way in which they chose to prove their faith.

Religion and religious practices are perhaps one of the most fertile areas for finding social criticisms in the works of Machado de Assis and Mark Twain. Although coming from very different backgrounds, each of these authors portrays his respective society as being first and foremost hypocritical in the way in which they approach their actions towards others or even their own personal beliefs. From not practicing what one preaches to actively hurting others in God’s name, there is much to question about what behavior was considered appropriate and how people’s beliefs affected their interactions with others. And it is this more than anything that these writers sought – the opening of people’s minds to new ideas, not merely the blind acceptance of what others have said. The humor behind the words, whether it be sarcastic, parodic, or even simply “funny” serves as a tool for bringing the author’s words to the reader in a way which might be more accessible, and therefore more penetrating.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION – MAKING US THINK

*“Francamente, eu não gosto de gente que venha adivinhando e  
compondo um livro que está sendo escrito com método.”*

*--Machado de Assis, Esaú e Jacó*

*“I have not jumped to this conclusion; I have traveled to it per gravel train,  
so to speak. I have thought the thing all out, and am quite sure I am right.”*

*--Mark Twain, A Tramp Abroad*

Humor in literature has a long history, and can serve a variety of purposes, from merely entertaining, amusing the reader, to creating a sense of catharsis, a release from what is most terrifying. It is somewhere between these two ends of the spectrum that the works of Machado de Assis and Mark Twain fall, entertaining their audiences but in an attempt to articulate the inherent hypocrisies and inconsistencies of behavior within society. As this study has shown, both of these authors were adept at manipulating language to surprise, amuse, but all the while instruct their readers.

Given that neither author was familiar with the work of the other, the fact that they shared so many opinions and that their styles contained such a high degree of similarity is remarkable, and so it is a shame that so little work has been done to compare the two. This study hopes to show the great extent to which the time period in which Machado and Twain lived and wrote influenced behavior and thought. One can see the importance of Gordon's statement, that "Comedy, in the nineteenth century, aimed at making us think" (128), as both authors certainly seemed to wish to open their readers' eyes and minds to the truth of the world surrounding them. The great advancements being made at that time, both in terms of technology and philosophy, created an atmosphere of confusion, in which people were trying to make sense of the world around them, often in a very inconsistent way.

In Brazil, the desire to maintain oneself in the best light possible when out in society held a great influence over individual comportment. It was not enough to belong to the right class or to think the right way, one also had to make sure that others were aware of it. We see this particularly clearly in the short story "Teoria do medalhão," which gives a nice guideline for elevating social standing with a minimum amount of effort. In the end, the most important thing to remember is to look out for one's own interests, and that altruism, although a nice thought,

ultimately meant serving one's own ends, and if someone else was helped along the way, so much the better. As Gledson mentioned, Machado was particularly interested in the "attitudes and conventions" (9) of people, and was adept at describing them in a way that amused, but also enlightened, his readers.

The great political changes that were occurring during the late nineteenth century in Brazil had a great affect on the comportment of the citizens. Divisions between monarchists and republicans caused turmoil, even within families, as we saw in the novel *Esau e Jacó*. However, even under the banner of democracy, the emperor still had the final say, and this in turn meant that the voice of the populace was still relatively silent. People often did not know which side to support, and instead chose to wait, professing allegiance for whichever political structure won out. It is not surprising then that political thought processes were contradictory among the citizens. The end of slavery also greatly affected the face of the population, causing societal structures to have to change in order to accommodate the new group of workers entering the free labor force.

In terms of religion, new fads were sweeping the nation, such as Spiritism, causing a nation that was already somewhat ambivalent in its religious practices to be easily swayed by the influx of new ideals. The difference between what people say they believe and what their actions would indicate becomes very great; in other words, one sees many instances of people not "practicing what they preach." Machado, not subscribing to any particular brand of theology, placed himself in the vantage point of outside observer, pointing out just how ridiculous some behavior was, such as vilifying Adam and Eve for causing Mankind's expulsion from Paradise, when in reality life as we know it would never have occurred had that event happened otherwise.

The United States was every bit as tumultuous during this period. There too people were concerned with keeping up appearances, and oftentimes not hitting the mark. As we saw with Sloane's statement, Twain reveled in the opportunity to describe the "failure of the world to live up to its own image of itself" (xvi), in which pretensions of grandeur more often than not lead to a show of one's own ineptitude.

Politically speaking, the most significant event of the era, the Civil War, is lacking in Twain's text, but one of its primary outcomes, the abolition of slavery, is a fundamental theme in one of this author's most famous novels, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Additionally, the problems inherent to any form of government, such as corruption and greed, make their way into his narratives. There can be no doubt as to Twain's opinions regarding non-democratic institutions, in particular monarchy, but this is not to say that he felt that his own country's system was without flaw. In particular Twain was leery of the dangers of extreme patriotism, especially when it led to acts of war.

Although a religious man himself, Twain was not blind to the problems that religion can bring, particularly when adherents take their faith to extreme levels, such as what happens when missionaries preach in other countries. Twain's portrayal of Biblical figures, particularly the way in which he characterizes Satan, gave him the ability to highlight the hypocritical nature of belief, such as the way in which Heaven is often depicted. He too, like Machado, criticized new faith structures, particularly Christian Science, as being "wildcat" – offshoots of the main faith, and likely not to yield many riches.

Though obviously influenced by their own societies, the trends happening throughout the Western world impacted greatly the works of Machado de Assis and Mark Twain. The ever-changing face of culture, politics, and religion created a fertile ground for hypocrisy, ever

observed with a cynical gaze, and it was in the depictions of this that these two authors produced some of their most famous works. Humor as a means of social criticism is universal, as we have seen, and whether Machado and Twain hoped actively to bring about change is irrelevant; the most important accomplishment in their writing was to make us, the readers, think.

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