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Peres, Savio Passafaro

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The phenomenology of the unconscious in the work of Machado de Assis

Savio Passafaro Peres*

Paulista State University Julio de Mesquita Filho, Department of Social and Educational Psychology, Assis, SP, Brazil

Abstract: In this article we seek, firstly, to elucidate how Machado de Assis developed the conception of the unconscious in the novel *Helena* (1876) and in the short story *Uma senhora* (1883). Secondly, we examine how his conception of unconscious can be elucidated phenomenologically, from the relation between reflective and pre-reflective awareness. In these narratives, Machado reveals how certain emotions, although not reflectively apprehended by the subject who lives them, manifest indirectly in actions, in body expressions and in the understanding of the world.

Keywords: unconscious, Machado de Assis, history of psychology in Brazil, phenomenological psychology.

The presence of the unconscious concept in the text and context of Machado de Assis

It is not new among his critics that Machado de Assis was deeply interested in psychiatry and in the romantic philosophy of the nineteenth century. This can be seen, for example, in the various psychiatry titles in his personal library (Jobim, 2001), among which we can find works by prominent psychiatrists, such as Théodule-Armand Ribot (1839-1916), Henry Maudsley (1835-1918), Marie Charles Joseph Bra (1854-1912). Machado portrayed throughout many short stories and novels the most varied psychic phenomena, such as delusions, dreams, obsessions, hallucinations (Lopes, 1981), besides examining passions, such as vanity, envy, love, hatred, remorse, jealousy, etc. As if that was not enough, his fictional universe is populated by a varied typology, relying on sadists, mentally insane, obsessives, narcissists and even psychopaths (Freitas, 2001, Lopes, 1981). Machado himself was a psychiatric affair, having, as Dostoevsky, the disease of the gods, epilepsy, which brought him extreme experiences of consciousness (Junior, 1938). All this, in addition to his vast literary and philosophical culture, contributed Machado to achieving an elaborate conception of psychic life, a concept that he improves throughout his literary career.

This interest for psychology and psychiatry was not, however, his privilege. In the second half of the nineteenth century, psychology occupies more and more space not only in European life, but also in Brazilian life, especially in the urban middle class, as can be seen in the growing space of psychology sections in newspapers and magazines of that time (Massimi, 1990). Moreover, the romantic movement of the nineteenth century has as one of its features the tendency to explore the obscure side and the irrational forces of the individual (Ellenberger, 1991).

There are currently studies that show how Machado, throughout his works, elaborated a complex conception of unconscious¹ (Barbieri, 1998, Freitas, 2001, Leite, 2002, Peres & Massimi, 2004, Peres, 2016). As far as the problem of the unconscious is concerned, one of the most quoted and analyzed short stories is *O cônego ou metafísica do estilo*, of 1885 (Peres & Massimi, 2004, Peres 2016, Barbieri, 2001). In this short story, the narrator presents the pompous and playful theory, according to which the source of poetic inspiration occurs in the unconscious. There are extremely rich passages, such as:

Now, however, the path is dark. We pass from consciousness to unconsciousness, where the confused elaboration of ideas takes place, where the reminiscences sleep or doze off. Here, life leaps without shapes, germs and debris, rudiments and sediments; it is the immense depth of the spirit. (Assis, 2004a, p. 275)

As Barbieri (1998) shows, this story was inspired on the Eduard von Hartmann's work, *Philosophy of the Unconscious*, from 1877. In the collection of the Machado de Assis Library, we find it in the French translation of 1881 (Jobim, 2001) There are several indications that Machado read it in the mid-1880s Note that Hartmann's (1877) work was widely debated at the end of the nineteenth century, and then fell into oblivion Nevertheless, it presents some rather interesting and provocative ideas, such as that the

¹ Note that Schwarz (1997), in his classic study *A master on the periphery of capitalism*, did not fail to be sensitive to the theme of the unconscious in the work of Machado de Assis. For him (p. 89, 1997), Machado "married new themes from the European philosophy of the unconscious with the historical position of the Brazilian elite." However, Schwarz does not offer a systematic treatment of the theme of the unconscious. On this occasion, we seek to explicit the conception of Machado and show that it can be interpreted according to Phenomenology. We must mention, however, that this "marriage" between the situation of the Brazilian elite and the theme of the unconscious proves to be an interesting path to be explored.

* Corresponding address: savioperes@yahoo.com.br

unconscious is distinguished on three levels: individual, social and cosmic (Hartmann, 1877).

Although Hartmann's work is, as far as the conception of the unconscious is concerned, a clear inspiration for Machado, his interest did not begin with reading the work of the German philosopher. Already in his second novel, *Helena*, of 1876, Machado worked on the conception that the human being is influenced by a dimension that escapes consciousness. In this work we find Estácio, a young man who is gradually falling in love, unaware, by his beautiful bastard sister, Helena. As I hope to show in the analyzes that will follow, even if unconscious, this feeling is growing and manifesting indirectly in various ways. Machado even uses the expression "unconscious" to preach Estácio's love. It is a passage in which one of the characters of the novel, Father Melchior, says to the boy: "Your heart is a great unconscious" (2004a, p. 363).

In addition to the factors already mentioned, there are others that explain why Machado anticipated and elaborated a rich conception of the unconscious even before the publication of Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900). Machado, as Freud,² was an avid reader of Schopenhauer, whose notion of will can be understood as a cosmic force that escapes the full consciousness of the individual (Ellenberger, 1991). Machado was an admirer of Allan Poe and shared with him his love for the dark side of human nature. He knew the works of Darwin, with whom he learned to distrust human rationality and pay attention to the strategies of the instincts. With Pascal (2004, pp. 127-128), he had learned that "the heart has reasons that reason does not know". French moralists of the sixteenth century had already devalued the strategies of self-love and the inclination to self-deception (Vauvenargues, 1998). In the same vein, the Brazilian Matias Aires, in 1752, in his *Reflections on the Vanity of Men* (1942), examined point-by-point the wit of vanity which, according to the author, is a passion that often acts from the underground:

Of all the passions, the most hidden one is vanity:
and it hides itself in such a way that almost

disappears, and ignores it: even the most pious actions are often born of a mystical vanity, which, the one who has it, does not know it and does not distinguish it: the self-satisfaction the soul receives is the same as a looking-glass in which we see ourselves as superior to other men for the good we do, and in this is the vanity of doing good. (Aires, 1993, p. 35)

The heart is a great unconscious

In the novel *Helena*, published in 1876, we find for the first time, more clearly, the presence of a conception of the unconscious in the work of Machado de Assis. The story begins with the death of a wealthy widower, Counselor Vale, who leaves to his son Estácio a wealthy inheritance. The will, however, brings a surprising confession. In it, Counselor Vale claims to have a bastard daughter, Helena, to whom he had secretly supported throughout his life and to whom his family should welcome once he was dead.

Estácio and his aunt, Mrs. Ursula, even though afraid, end up fulfilling his father's wish; they receive the new member of the family full of suspicion and distrust. But Helen, with great skill and a generous heart, gradually make herself welcome in the house. Sometime later, Estácio is already in great affection for his new sister, having her as a friend and confidant, and even a little more.

A few months later, a friend of Estácio's, Mendonça, returns from Europe. After some visits to his friend's house, he sees in Helena a possible wife and starts to court her. The girl returns with affection. Noticing the romance mood, the family's priest, Melchior, plans to marry them as soon as possible. He consults the girl first and finds out that she approves the marriage. Shortly after, alone with Helena and Mendonça, the priest anticipates the young man and declares that he would like to marry them. Their approval is immediate. Mendonça then sends Estácio a message on the following day announcing his wish to marry Helena and asking for his consent. Estácio, however, took a dim view of the proposal. He decides to question his sister to see if she really wants to marry Mendonça, to which she says yes. Despite the affirmative answer, Estácio realizes that he can not accept the marriage, because she had confessed to him, a while before, to have another love. Helena does not accept the argument and seeks to persuade Estácio to accept the marriage to Mendonça, but in vain.

After failing to reach an agreement with Helena, Estácio resolves, in order to clarify his ideas, to consult Father Melchior on the subject. To his disappointment, the priest also stands in favor of the marriage. Estácio is still not happy with it and begins to argue with the priest, struggling to find arguments against marriage. In the meantime, Mendonça appears and Estácio does not hesitate to strongly and injuriously express his opposition

² In many ways, although we are proposing a phenomenological interpretation that aims to understand the description of Machado's idea of consciousness versus unconsciousness through the pre-reflective self-awareness key versus reflective self-awareness, we should note that the way Machado describes consciousness anticipates, in some aspects, the distinctions made by Freud, in the first topic, between unconscious, preconscious and conscious. There are, however, certain limitations of approximation. According to Zahavi (1999), Freud operates with the concept of consciousness from the reflective model of self-awareness. That is, for Freud, a psychic process is conscious as far as it is the object of attention. Gomes (2003, p. 123) follows in the same thought, saying that, for Freud, "Becoming conscious, for a representation, means, therefore, to be noticed by this system where the excitations occur in a fleeting way and without leaving trace. Among the preconscious representations, only a few are chosen by the attention, at every moment, to become conscious." Due to the focus of this article, we only indicate such aspects, since a detailed discussion of this promising theme would require an extensive investigative effort.

to the marriage. Tempers flare, Mendonça reacts, and the friends fight. On the next day, Estácio decides to talk again with his sister, who remains firm in her resolution and asks him to make amends with Mendonça. Estácio finally gives in and goes to visit his friend.

Mendonça forgives him, but still Estácio can not accept the marriage. What he does not know is that he loves his own sister, which the priest had already realized. In chapter XXIII, in one of the climaxes of the novel, the priest reveals to Estácio the love he feels for Helena, but still does not know it exists. Before exposing what he already knows, Melchior asks Estácio two questions, in order to prepare him for the emotional charge of the revelation of his incestuous love: “Are you strong?” and “Do you believe in God?” Estácio, suspicious, answers yes.

First, the priest exposes a whole theory about the unconscious. In fact, his explanations about the way the unconscious acts are very long and meticulous. This is possibly explained by the fact that Machado knew, in 1876, that he should convince the reader of the existence of such phenomenon. The priest begins his speech associating the heart with a “great unconscious”:

“Well, you transgressed the divine law, as well as the human law, without knowing it. Your heart is a great unconscious; it stirs, murmurs, rebels, wanders into a misexpressed and misunderstood instinct. Evil pursues you, tempts you, evolves you in its golden and hidden bonds; you do not feel it, you do not see it; you will be disgusted with yourself when you face him. God, who reads you, knows perfectly well that between your heart and your conscience there is a thick veil that separates them, that prevents this agreement that generates crime.

‘But what is it, Father-Master?’

Melchior leaned forward and stared at the young man. His eyes, fixed on him, were like a polished and cold mirror, designed to reproduce the image of what he was going to say.

‘Estácio,’ said Melchior, slowly, ‘you love your sister.’ (2004a, p. 363).’

If we consider that this novel was published in 1876, when the novelist had not yet read Hartmann’s *Philosophy of the Unconscious*, this passage of the book is surprising, either by precision or by the richness to which the phenomenon is described. The way the priest confirms his hypothesis, that is, by the expressions of the boy, is remarkable: “The gesture mingled with horror, astonishment, and remorse with which Estácio had heard this word, showed the priest not only that he was right, but also that he had just revealed it to the young

man” (2004a, 364). Although Estácio’s conscience repels the priest’s words, his body admits them, which makes it clear that the body is the privileged place of expression of the unconscious.

Estácio’s difficulty in facing feelings that remained in his unconscious continues to be explained in the following paragraphs, in which the narrator explains the boy’s reactions to the revelation, as can be seen in the following passage:

What his conscience ignored, his heart knew, and I only told him at that solemn hour. Consciousness, after groping in the darkness, drew back in terror, as if keeping away from itself the sudden glare that the priest’s word had lit in it. Estácio did not answer; he could not answer anything. With what word and in what human language could he express the new and terrible commotion that had shaken his whole soul? What thread could tie him to the broken and scattered ideas? He did not speak, nor dare to raise his eyes; he looked stupid and dead. (2004a, p. 364).

Even after the initial shock, Estácio continues to resist before the revelation, rejecting it with vague and disjointed words, from which “it could be concluded that he does not believe in Melchior’s revelation, that the supposed feeling was so absurd and unnatural that it should only should be attributed to bad instincts” (2004a, p. 364).

The priest, after listening to Estácio, takes up the word again, correcting him: “Bad instincts, no, replied Melchior; nor deviation from social and religious law, but unconscious deviation. Enter into your heart, Estácio; look in the most intimate places, and there you will find this baleful germ” (2004a, p. 364). Then the priest explains to Estácio how the feeling appeared in him. The main problem laid in the fact that when he first met Helena³, she already had “all the seductions of a woman” (2004a, p. 364), without him having “the image of her childhood and the communion of the first years” (2004a, p. 364). Little by little, Estácio gets used to the priest’s words until the obscure finally becomes transparent (2004a, p. 366).

Estácio’s love for Helena, as the priest revealed, was born without the boy noticing. However, although unconsciously, it does not fail to influence him in all sorts of ways – we can note it when Estácio tries to persuade himself that his friend is not a good candidate for marriage, or his excessive preoccupations with Helena. See the excessive jealousy he feels: one afternoon, watching her through a window crack, he finds her reading a letter. The idea that the letter could be loving “upset him a lot”:

Estácio was moved with grand curiosity, to which a shadow of spite and jealousy was mingling. The

3 Actually, Helena was not Estácio’s true sister, a fact that the girl hides throughout the novel.

idea that Helena could share her heart with someone else was disconcerting and irritating him at the same time. He could not explain the reason for such exclusive interest, nor did he try to investigate it; he only felt the effects and stood there, not knowing what to do. (2004a, p. 306).

Curious to know the content of the correspondence, Estácio approaches the sister and asks her about the letter, to which she answers: “Do you want to read it?” Estácio then “blushed and refused with a gesture” (2004a, p. 306). The reason for Estácio’s blush seems to be shame, which is intensified by his love for Helena, showing, once again, how the body manifests the unconscious. In another situation, when both are walking in the garden, Estácio asks Helena if she is thinking of love affairs:

Helena did not answer; she took his arm, and they followed silently for ten minutes. Arriving on a wooden bench, Estácio sat down; Helena stood before him. They looked at each other without uttering a word; but Estácio’s lip twitched two or three times as if hesitating about what he was going to say. Finally, the young man won.

– Helena, he said, you love.

The girl shivered and blushed; looked around her, frightened, and laid her hands on his shoulders. Did she give a thought on what she said after? It is doubtful; but the voice, which on this occasion seemed to concentrate all the melodies of the human word, slowly sighed:

– Very, very much!

Estácio paled. The girl stepped back and, trembling, put the finger to her own mouth, as if imposing silence. Shame flared in her face; Helena turned her back on her brother and hurried away. (2004a, p. 312).

The pallor, the glances, the trembling lips are signs that the love between them is already present in this scene. We can say that their bodies already love each other, although the presence of love has not yet penetrated into Estácio’s consciousness. In the case of Helena, she is supposed to have known of her love for Estácio, since she, throughout her time in the house, was aware that she was not the blood daughter of Estácio’s father, Counselor Vale. In the case of Estácio, love is experienced, but not understood.

Machado, in 1876, begins to delineate a sophisticated conception of the unconscious. It is not simply something that hides behind consciousness, but a type of consciousness that does not reveal itself. We can see that the feeling is “unconscious” not because

it is not felt, but because it is, as the priest affirms, “a misexpressed and misunderstood feeling” (2004a, p. 363). Love is conscious as far as it is felt. But it is unconscious as far as it is “misexpressed and misunderstood.” In other words, love is felt on a conscious level, but this same love is not brought to consciousness by a process of conceptual explication in which loving experience becomes the subject of a reflective thinking.

It is clear, therefore, that we can interpret the concept of the unconscious from the articulation between two conceptions of consciousness: one in the strict sense and one in the broad sense.

In a strict sense, the feeling of love is unconscious since the protagonist is unaware of its presence. It is unconscious as far as it is not formulated in linguistic experiences that bring it to his understanding. That is, Estácio feels the effects of his love, but does not make it explicit for himself.

In a broad conception, however, the experience of love is conscious as far as it is felt by the subject. The feeling is one among other conscious experiences of the character. A feeling, as it is felt, cannot be unconscious. In this conception, there is no meaning to affirm the existence of an unconscious feeling. An unconscious pain, for example, is not a pain, it is just a physiological state. Pain is a form of conscious manifestation. This is revealed, for example, in psychiatric cases, such as when subjects feel pain in a phantom limb. Therefore, there is good reasons to assert that, when Machado speaks of an unconscious feeling, he is not referring to a feeling that is withdrawn from consciousness, but to a feeling that, although present, is not noticed, is not thematized and articulated conceptually by a reflective experience, as the passage shows: “He did not explain the reason for such exclusive interest (n.d.r: the feeling of love) or tried to investigate it” (2004a, p. 306). This situation is well expressed by the Danish philosopher Dan Zahavi (1999, p. 206):

Although I may not be unconscious of my present experience, I might very well ignore it in favor of its object, and this is of course the natural attitude. In my daily life I am absorbed by and preoccupied with projects and objects of the world. Thus, pervasive pre-reflective self-awareness is definitely not identical with total self-comprehension but can instead be likened to a pre-comprehension that allows for subsequent reflection and thematization.

This position is admittedly inspired by Husserlian phenomenology. In fact, Husserl (1984, p.355) distinguishes, as Zahavi (2002, 1999) points out, several concepts of consciousness, among which, for the purposes of this article, stand out: (1) intentional awareness, (2) pre-reflective self-awareness, and (3) reflective self-awareness. These are three concepts that we will investigate in the next sections.

Intentional awareness

The term “awareness” refers here to the consciousness of something external to itself. In order to clarify this concept, we can base ourselves on the following analogy: Imagine that we are walking in a dark cave with the aid of a flashlight. As we walk through the cave, our intentional awareness is directed toward something transcendent, that is, towards the path, obstacles etc. In this case, we are not paying attention to the experience of seeing the way, but purely and simply on the way. There is a difference between paying attention on the way and paying attention to the experience of seeing the way. Most of the time, we are aware of objects, situations and projects relative to the world. This “awareness of something” is what Husserl calls “intentional experience.” It has several forms, that is, there are several types of intentional experience, such as imagining something, perceiving something, remembering something, doubting something.

Every experience is an event itself that occurs in awareness. That is, the flow of awareness is nothing more than a flow of experiences (Husserl, 1984, p. 355). One of the most important points of the intentional conception of awareness is that it breaks with the old notion that understands it as a closed box, full of internal contents. That is, we are not only aware of what is within our consciousness, but of what is outside of it, or rather, of what is transcendent to it (Sokolowski, 2004). With that, Husserl (1984) criticizes the representational theory of perception. For Husserlian phenomenology, if I see a rose, I do not see the representation of a rose, I see the rose itself.

Pre-reflective self-awareness

Let us return to the previous example. As we walk through the cave, with our attention directed to the illuminated surface, we are also, in a sense, aware of our own hand, which holds and handles the flashlight, in order to control the focus of light. In this case, we are aware of the hand in a distinct way of how we are aware of the illuminated area. I am aware of my hand and its movements without giving them the privilege of my attention. That is, I have a pre-reflective self-awareness of my hand. What characterizes the pre-reflective awareness is that, in it, the experience does not manifest itself as an object. At this moment, for example, I have several sensory experiences: thermal, auditory, movement (kinesthesia), etc. Such sensations are conscious, but they do not manifest themselves as objects. If I am simply occupied with seeing a table, I experience seeing it, it is part of the flow of awareness and, in this sense, it is conscious. However, it is a pre-reflective experience that I have of the table. In short, as far as I am purely and simply oriented to the world, my experiences do not appear as opposed to me. I, so

to speak, am immersed in my experiences, addressing myself to the world.⁴

Reflective self-awareness

However, I can at any moment reflect about the experience in which I am immersed. As Husserl writes: “We realized directly, for example, the house and not the realization itself. It is only through reflection that we turn to the act itself and to its being perceptually directed towards the house” (Husserl, 1991, p. 72). In other words, in reflection, the flow of awareness ceases to go outward to directs to itself.

Reflective experiences constitute a certain class of experiences. Sometimes Husserl calls the reflexive experience “inner perception,” or “perception directed to immanence” (1952, p. 84). It is an experience that, instead of being directed to the outside world, it is directed to another experience. When this occurs, the experience on which we reflect, that is, the experience perceived reflexively, manifests itself as an object. “Natural reflection essentially changes the experience that was previously naive; it loses the original way of being immediately directed, precisely because reflection makes object what before was experience, but not something objective.” (1991, p. 72).

Let us return for a while to our example, in which we walk in the cave. Although, in general, our consciousness is directed towards the illuminated path, we can at any moment shift attention and explicitly focus on the hand that controls the flashlight. At that moment, the hand and its movements become a theme of which the mind engages. In this case, this would be equivalent to a move to use the flashlight to illuminate our own hand. But why would anyone do this reflexive movement? In many cases this movement just causes more problems than solutions. If I stop paying attention on the way to pay attention to the texture of the flashlight, its shape, etc., I run the risk of falling into some abyss. Circumstances call for my attention to be drawn to the immediate physical environment. My attention would only turn to my hand if it is not performing well, for example, if it is perspiring and the flashlight begins to slip between my fingers. It will drive my attention to the hand, for me to solve this problem, and wipe it. In other words, the reflexive attitude occurs only for vital reasons in rare moments.

In our natural attitude, we are immersed in experiences directly driven to the world, not just the immediate physical world, but the world as a whole, including the horizon of past and future (for example, when we plan something, we are directed to the future). For this reason, Husserl points

⁴ This applies, in general, to sensory experiences. Sensations are components of perceptual experiences, but they are not noticed in perception. For this reason, Husserl writes: “I do not see color-sensations but colored things, I do not hear tone-sensations but the singer’s song” (2001, p. 99). Thus, through intentional experiences we are aware of something transcendent to the experience.

out that if there is reflexive movement, it is because there is some form of motivation, some internal requirement for the flow that makes it yield to itself.

In reflection, there is a thematic change, for in it we withdraw the focus of the world and direct it to our own experiences, which until then were experienced in a naive, pre-reflexive way. For example, in reflection, instead of thinking about how to do evil to the person I hate, I proceed to examine the experience of hatred I feel for it. In this case, I cease to thematize the person and how I can harm them, to thematize my own feeling. With reflection, I cease to act immersed in feeling, to alienate it from myself, to treat it as an object opposed to me and to observe it at a certain critical distance. Of course, this shift in focus does not occur randomly; it stems from a motivation. And what motivation takes the person to reflect? There can be many reasons. For example, a possible motive for thematizing hatred is self-determination, of moral character, of not allowing oneself to act in accordance with hatred.

Partial discussion

Articulating these three forms of awareness to Estácio's phenomenological understanding of the unconscious, we can say that he lives pre-reflexively the intentional experience of love for Helena. He is immersed in his loving experience, behaving towards the world as from it. The way he opens himself up significantly to the world and, particularly, to Helen is tacitly ruled by his loving experience. Although love is the source of motivation of several other experiences, such as jealousy, shame or sudden dislike for Mendonça, his love life remains unthematized. That is, Estácio does not distance himself from his own experience to examine it frontally, from a reflexive attitude.

It is remarkable that Machado has, through Father Melchior's words, shown that this reflexive self-qualm of the experience is linked to its expression and linguistic thematization. Reflection is a condition so that experience enters into the linguistic space of awareness, and can be explained, predicated and articulated comprehensively in the global context of life. Machado presents the idea that feeling is unconscious, as far as he, although alive pre-reflexively, remains unnoticed and linguistic-conceptually inarticulate, remaining a "misexpressed and misunderstood" instinct (2004a, p. 363). It is the voice of the other, in this case Father Melchior, what pushes the reflexive attitude through in Estácio, so that he can no longer not see in himself the feeling of love.

Mrs. Camila: "a feeling is worth a reason"

In the short story *Uma senhora*⁵, of 1883, Machado develops a conception of unconscious very similar to the

one present in the novel *Helena*. We could apply to the central character of the story, Mrs. Camila, the words that Father Melchior addressed to Estácio: "between your heart and your conscience there is something like a thick veil that separates them." But in *Uma senhora*, what drives the behavior of the protagonist is not love, but vanity.

We find in this story Mrs. Camila, whose beauty did not go unnoticed and whose age did not match the luster of her faces. Her daughter, Ernestina, "had the freshness of years; but her mother's beauty was more perfect, and despite the years, she surpassed that of her daughter" (2004b, p. 425). It does not prevent Mrs. Camila from feeling threatened when some boys begin to flirt with her daughter:

One day, a few months later, the first boyfriend came up. Mrs. Camila had vaguely thought of this calamity, without facing it, without preparing for the defense. When she least expected it, she found a suitor at the door. She questioned her daughter and discovered in her an indefinable uproar, the inclination of the twenties, and fell weak. Marrying her was the least, but if beings are as the waters of the Scripture, they do not return, because behind them come others, as behind waters there are more waters; and to define these successive waves is that men invented this name of grandchildren. Mrs. Camila saw her imminent first grandson and was determined to postpone it. It is clear that she did not formulate the resolution, as she did not formulate the idea of the danger. The soul understands itself; a feeling is worth a thought. The ones she had were swift, dark, in the depths of her being, from where she had not extracted so she would not have to face them. (2004b, p. 425)

From the feeling of vanity comes the fear of old age. Becoming a grandmother is assuming her age before the world and herself. This is why she wanted to postpone the wedding. And we must note that this fear of becoming a grandmother, as well as the decision to disrupt and get in the way of her daughter's marriage, is not explicitly formulated at the level of awareness: "It is clear that she did not formulate the resolution, as she had not formulated the idea of the danger." (2004b, p. 425). However, despite not expressing the decision for herself, she acts and experiences the world in a way that delays her daughter's marriage. That is, the determination to postpone marriage does not emerge in her consciousness as an idea or reasoning, but as sensations. In fact, Mrs. Camila does not approve any of her daughter's boyfriends, always finding problems in them. She believes, however, that the real reason for the antipathy she feels for the young boys are their own fault, and not because of the possible matrimony consequences. That is, there is in Mrs. Camila a tendency to look for defects in her daughter's suitors. But this inclination is not thematized or made explicit by her own conscience.

⁵ The short story is in the volume *Histórias sem data*.

What draws attention to this story is the complexity with which the veiled vanity acts in Mrs. Camila. Vanity is not limited to an instance that remains hidden, but involves something more elaborate, such as an underground intelligence. Moved to protect vanity, the soul is able to glimpse future possibilities and identify which of them are undesirable, strategically acting to avoid them. All this performance of the soul, however, does not take place on a conscious-reflective level. Therefore, if we say that the operations of the soul are unconscious, we should add that the unconscious is not blind to the world. It cannot be compared to a dark basement, in the underground of the soul. Note that Machado does not properly speak of an “unconscious” vanity: he rather uses the expression “the soul understands itself” (2004b, p. 425). That is, this pre-understanding that the soul has of itself occurs at a pre-reflective level.

We can say that in this short story the soul is presented as something that has, so to speak, layers. And not all of these layers are transparent to it. The narrator says that the sensations occur “in the most intimate of his being.” And the intimate of being is not transparent to the subject, is not given explicitly. These sensations are not thematized in order to become objects opposed to the self, as it is clear at the moment when the narrator says that Mrs. Camila “had not extract so she would not have to face them” (2004b, p. 425). In other words, the concept of soul, in a sense, involves both consciousness (in the strict sense) and unconsciousness (pre-reflective consciousness). Unconscious and conscious belong to the same whole, which is the soul.

The soul cannot be compared to an interiority nor to the conscious life because that is what gives life and moves the individual. Consciousness is a layer of the soul. And linguistic experiences constitute the highest form of this conscious layer. Thus, when the narrator states that “the soul understands itself,” he is not saying that this understanding occurs from conscious linguistic experiences, expressed in an “inner speech.” This is reinforced when the narrator says that “a feeling is worth a thought” (2004b, p. 425). And the feelings of Mrs. Camila defend her self-esteem, avoiding the grandchildren. Let us see in detail how Mrs. Camila avoids her daughter’s marriage.

Ribeiro, Ernestina’s first boyfriend, is about to receive a diplomatic post in the United States and, before leaving abroad, decides to ask his girlfriend to marry him. Mrs. Camila objected to the request, claiming that she did not want to be distant from her daughter. Another candidate emerges, a widower of twenty-seven years old. Mrs. Camila, at first, accepts the new suitor, but soon struggles to find any problems with the young man:

She could not allege anything against him; he had a nose as straight as the consciousness, and a deep dislike for diplomatic life. But there should be other

defects, there must be others. Mrs. Camila looked for them deeply; asked him about his relationships, habits, past. She managed to find insignificant things, just a detail of human imperfection, alternatives of humor, lack of intellectual graces, and, finally a great excess of self-esteem. That was how the beautiful lady caught him. She began to slowly raise the wall of silence; first launched the layer of pauses, more or less long, then the short phrases, then the monosyllables, the distractions, the absorptions, the complacent looks, the resigned ears, the fake yawns behind the hand fan. He did not understand right away; but, when he noticed that the temper of the mother coincided with the daughter’s absences, thought it was there and retired. If he had been a man of struggle, he would have jumped the wall; but he was proud and weak. Mrs. Camila gave thanks to the gods. (2004b, p. 426)

Behind antipathies there may be hidden causes. Mrs. Camila believes that the reason she does not like her daughter’s boyfriends is their fault. Ironically, Mrs. Camila sees the “excess of self-esteem” as the biggest flaw of the second suitor. As we have seen, she is inclined to find defects in her daughter’s suitors. But she does not notice this inclination, as far as she does not explicitly assume it for herself. Her motivation is somewhat sordid since it is based on her own egoism and not on the happiness of her daughter. Mrs. Camila is afraid of becoming a grandmother and having to face the condition that time, always ruthless, imposed on her. Becoming a grandmother would be to assume her advanced age, for herself and for others, and this was something that her vanity was not willing to accept.

In *Uma senhora*, we have the outline of a psychic model in which some conscious feelings, such as antipathy and sympathy, are the consequence of unconscious factors, that is, of a vanity that is present and active at a pre-reflective level. This short story recollects a psychological structure analogous to that of the novel *Helena*, concerning the jealousy which Estácio felt for her. Just as Estácio, moved by his unconscious love, feels dislike for Helena’s suitor, also Mrs. Camila, moved by unconscious vanity, finds defects in her daughter’s suitors. Thus, what can be “unconscious,” in the sense of not being noticed by a reflective apprehension, are not only the experiences, but also the motivational links between experiences belonging to the same flow. As Husserl writes in *Ideas II*:

In this context, the singular experience is then motivated by a hidden background, it has “psychic motives,” to which one can ask: how did this thing come to my mind – what has led me to this? The fact that this question is possible characterizes any motivation in general. “Motives” are often hidden in depth but can be brought to light through

“psychoanalysis.” A thought “reminds me” of another thought, a vivid past comes to mind. In some cases, this link may even be noticed. But in most cases, although the motivation is actually present in the consciousness, it does not come to assume a relief, it is not noticed, it is inadvertent (“unconscious”).⁶ (Husserl, 1952, p. 223)

Conclusion

One of Machado’s greatest contributions to psychology and its history lies not only in the fact that in the nineteenth century he had a conception of the unconscious, but in how he articulated in his fiction the relation between consciousness, body, and unconsciousness.

As we could observe, the unconscious delineates itself and comes to life from the description of

consciousness and the body. Thus, the unconscious is not an abstract, hidden and metaphysical entity. In a phenomenological interpretation, we can say that Machado presents a conception of unconsciousness that can easily be interpreted as a consciousness that does not express itself reflectively. The experiences that constitute the pre-reflective life manifest themselves in the body, in the conduct, in the ways in which the person interprets and feels the several aspects of their surrounding world. The experiences participating in the stream of consciousness, are experienced by the individual, but are not always met by the I, themed as reflexive acts of the spirit object. We have seen that Machado describes the psychic life to reveal that an unconscious emotion is not something that is absent from consciousness, but something that is present, although “misexpressed and misunderstood” (2004a, p. 363).

A fenomenologia do inconsciente na obra de Machado de Assis

Resumo: Neste artigo buscamos, em primeiro lugar, elucidar como Machado de Assis desenvolveu a concepção de inconsciente no romance *Helena* (1876) e no conto *Uma senhora* (1883). Em segundo lugar, examinamos como sua concepção de inconsciente pode ser elucidada fenomenologicamente, a partir da relação entre consciência reflexiva e pré-reflexiva. Nestas narrativas, Machado revela como certas emoções, embora não sejam apreendidas reflexivamente pelo sujeito que as vive, manifestam-se indiretamente nas ações, nas expressões corporais e no modo de compreender o mundo.

Palavras-chave: inconsciente, Machado de Assis, história da psicologia no Brasil, psicologia fenomenológica.

La phénoménologie de l’inconscient dans l’œuvre de Machado de Assis

Résumé: Dans cet article, nous examinons, d’abord, comprendre comment Machado de Assis a développé le concept de l’inconscient dans le roman *Helena* (1876) et le conte *Uma Senhora* (1883). En second lieu, nous cherchons à voir comment sa conception de l’inconscient peut être élucidée phénoménologiquement, par la relation entre la conscience réfléchie et la pensée préreflexion. Dans ces récits, Machado révèle comment certaines émotions, bien que non appréhendées par le sujet qui les vit, se manifestent indirectement dans les actions, les expressions corporelles et la compréhension du monde.

Mots-clés: inconscient, Machado de Assis, histoire de la psychologie au Brésil, la psychologie phénoménologique.

La fenomenología del inconsciente en la obra de Machado de Assis

Resumen: En este artículo buscamos, en primer lugar, mostrar cómo Machado de Assis desarrolló la concepción del inconsciente en la novela *Helena* (1876) y en el cuento *Uma Senhora* (1883). En segundo lugar, examinamos cómo su concepción del inconsciente puede ser elucidada fenomenológicamente, a partir de la relación entre la conciencia reflexiva y pre-reflexiva. En estas narraciones, Machado revela cómo ciertas emociones, aunque no reflexivamente aprehendidas por el sujeto que las vive, se manifiestan indirectamente en las acciones, en las expresiones corporales y en el modo de entender el mundo.

Palabras clave: inconsciente, Machado de Assis, historia de la psicología en Brasil, psicología fenomenológica.

6 Given the importance of the passage to the developed argument, I quote in German: “Das einzelne darin ist im dunklen Untergrunde motiviert, hat seine „seelischen Gründe“, nach denen man fragen kann: wie komme ich darauf, was hat mich dazu gebracht? Daß man so fragen kann, charakterisiert alle Motivation überhaupt. Die „Motive“ sind oft tief verborgen, aber durch „Psychoanalyse“ zutage zu fördern. Ein Gedanke „erinnert“ mich an andere Gedanken, ruft ein vergangenes Erlebnis in die Erinnerung zurück usw. In manchen Fällen kann das wahrgenommen werden. In den meisten Fällen aber ist die Motivation zwar im Bewußt sein wirklich vorhanden, aber sie kommt nicht zur Abhebung, sie ist unbemerkt oder unmerklich („unbewußt“). (1952, p. 223)

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