

## Success is counted sweetest

Success is counted sweetest  
By those who ne'er succeed.  
To comprehend a nectar  
Requires sorest need.

Not one of all the purple Host  
Who took the Flag today  
Can tell the definition  
So clear of Victory

As he defeated—dying—  
10 On whose forbidden ear  
The distant strains of triumph  
Burst agonized and clear!

*"Success is counted sweetest."* The paradox of victory and defeat fascinates Dickinson, as the final poem in this selection suggests. Here, as often is the case, Dickinson confronts a tired old saying, "To the Victor Goes the Spoils," and suggests that only the defeated can truly understand the sweetness of victory. What Whitman often conveys by bombast, Dickinson does by intensifying an image throwing off conventional wisdom to find truth in places least expected.

## Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis

1839–1908

wah-KEEM  
mah-REE-ah  
mah-CHAH-thoh  
thay ah-SEES

With over two hundred short stories and some nine novels to his name, **Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis** is Brazil's greatest writer, but he has only recently become known in the United States. Literature written in Portuguese does not have a solid reputation in the Western world, and Machado de Assis, unfortunately, was not widely translated into English until after World War II. Experts divide his work into two periods: before 1880, when his writings were generally "romantic"—love stories and parlor dramas—and after 1880, when they became critical of the middle class, ironic, and experimental. After 1880, Machado de Assis tends to de-emphasize plot and action and begins to probe beneath the surface of his characters using what could be called psychological **REALISM**, a tendency reminiscent of European writers of that same period, such as Flaubert, Stendahl, and Chekhov. The satiric playfulness of *The Posthumous Mem-*

oires of *Bras Cubas* (*Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas*, 1881) seems to be indebted to Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*.<sup>1</sup> Machado de Assis's use of literary devices that draw the reader into consciously questioning the boundaries between fiction and reality anticipates the Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges.<sup>2</sup> The darkness of the Brazilian's vision seems to reflect the disillusionment of European and American intellectuals with institutions and society around the turn of the century.

**Overcoming Obstacles.** Machado de Assis's Portuguese mother, who worked as a washerwoman, died in childbirth, and Joaquim was raised by a woman of mixed race whom his father, himself a mixed-race house painter from Rio de Janeiro, eventually married. After his father died, his stepmother became a cook in a girl's school. Joaquim's formal education was limited to elementary school, but he ultimately overcame poverty and adversity to pursue his dream of becoming a writer. Throughout his life he suffered from physical ailments that undoubtedly curbed his activities: stuttering, eye problems, and epilepsy. In 1856 he became an apprentice printer with the Imprensa Nacional; working first as a typesetter, he later became a proofreader and an editor. His informal education included associating with other writers and translating. Despite Machado de Assis's lack of formal schooling, he was very well read in foreign literature, especially English. In 1869 he married Carolina Augusta, a Portuguese woman, and they settled in Rio where Machado de Assis completed his first collection of short stories, *Stories of Rio de Janeiro* (*Contos fluminenses*, 1869).

**From Romance to Realism.** Before 1880, Machado de Assis had published three collections of poetry, the story collections *Stories of Rio de Janeiro* and *Midnight Stories* (*Histórias da meia-noite*, 1873), and four novels; *Resurrection* (*Ressureição*, 1872); *The Hand and the Glove* (*A mão e a luva*, 1874); *Helena* (1876); and *Yayá Garcia* (*Iaiá Garcia*, 1878). These works fall into what is considered Machado de Assis's Romantic phase and are mostly entertaining love stories. During this time he worked as a bureaucrat in various governmental ministries, like Agriculture and Public Roads, and lived a rather quiet life while his energies went into his writing.

In 1878 the Brazilian suffered a physical collapse stemming from stressing his delicate health, and he retreated to a mountain resort for three months. Upon his return to Rio, his writing changed. The publication of *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas* in 1881, curiously translated in 1952 as *Epitaph of a Small Winner* (recently translated as *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas*), seems to mark a major turning point in Machado de Assis's writing style and attitude towards his subject matter.

People cannot talk about literary production in Brazil without thinking of Machado de Assis. The perfection of his style and the harmony of all qualities demanded from a great writer make him one of the most (perhaps the most) complete personage of our literature.

— CARLA DIEGUEZ,  
Joaquim Maria  
Machado de Assis: A  
Short Biography

<sup>1</sup> Laurence Sterne: (1713–1768) Wrote *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1767), which is filled with eccentricities, digressions, and incoherencies.

<sup>2</sup> Jorge Luis Borges: (1899–1986), Argentinean short story writer who mixed the elements of fiction and non-fiction while exploring different layers of consciousness and dream realities.

Machado de Assis is arguably the most distinguished writer in Latin America's history. But the rubric "Latin America" runs the risk of misunderstanding his radically hybrid identity. Machado joins wide reading and classical learning in European literature and philosophy with the experience of the social transformations sweeping the Brazil of slavery and empire in the late nineteenth century.

— K. DAVID JACKSON,  
*The New York Times on  
 the Web*, 1998

This novel, dedicated to "the first worm that gnawed my flesh," is written from the point of view of someone beyond the grave and addresses the reader with speculations about meaning. In this writer's two other great novels, *Philosopher or Dog?* (*Quincas Borba*, 1892) and *Dom Casmurro* (1900), he continues a theme that links him to such European novelists of the nineteenth century as Honoré de Balzac and Émile Zola—the indifference of the world to the individual life. A far cry from the earlier Romantic who perceived the environment as a reflection of the individual psyche. The work of the last period of Machado de Assis's life is characterized by suggestion and innuendo, the exploration of consciousness.

His last novel, *Counselor Ayres' Memorial* (*Memorial de Ayres*, 1908), represents another change of direction; it celebrates love and fidelity and is an indirect tribute to his wife, Carolina, who died in 1904. When the Brazilian Academy of Letters was founded in 1897, Machado de Assis was elected its president, a position he held until his death in 1908. As an agnostic, he declined to have a priest in attendance at his deathbed.

**Recognition Comes Late.** In all, Machado de Assis wrote nine novels, four collections of poetry, more than two hundred short stories, numerous translations, several plays, and hundreds of newspaper columns. Though he experimented with various kinds of writing, from poetry to literary criticism, his reputation in the United States is largely based on his fiction. In style and subject matter, he was far ahead of his Brazilian contemporaries. Nevertheless, he was not recognized in the English-speaking world until after his death. Three short stories were anthologized in *Brazilian Tales* (1921), an edition of Brazilian writers published by Pocket Library in 1921. The publication of the novel *Epitaph of a Small Winner* in 1952, seventy-one years after its publication in Brazil, finally brought Machado de Assis international recognition. The first collection of short stories devoted entirely to him was *The Psychiatrist and Other Stories*, a collection of twelve stories that was published in 1963.

**"Adam and Eve."** Originally published in 1885 as "Adão e Eva," the story "Adam and Eve" was published in English in 1977 as part of the collection *The Devil's Church and Other Stories*. The setting for the story is a dinner party at a plantation in the 1700s. During a discussion of the story of Adam and Eve and of whether man or woman is responsible for the Fall, a judge—a symbol of education and thoughtfulness—presents an entirely different version of the story than the one found in Genesis. His tale reflects the ancient DUALISTIC TRADITION<sup>3</sup> that the earth was originally the creation and domain of the dark or evil powers—Satan and the fallen angels. In this version, the earth becomes the battleground between good and evil, light and dark. Adam and Eve resist temptation by a female

<sup>3</sup> dualistic tradition: Dualism in religion is a belief that there is a god of light and goodness and a deity of evil and darkness, and that these two deities compete for the souls of humans. A final battle is prophesied to take place between them when goodness and light will prevail. The ancient Persian prophet Zoroaster taught the first dualistic doctrines circa 1000 B.C.E. His tenets apparently influenced later Christian teachings about Satan.

Henri Rousseau, *Eve*

This painting shows the archetypal image of Eve accepting fruit from the evil serpent. (Hamburger Kunsthalle)



serpent and are welcomed into heaven for their piety; the earth is abandoned to darkness. The guests at the dinner party, including the hostess, have no idea how to interpret the judge's version of the most famous and influential story in the Western world. Adopting a rather ironic attitude, the judge draws a quick conclusion and shifts attention back to the dessert, a subject that his fellow diners can handle.

Machado de Assis wrote this story at about the time in the nineteenth century when science was making claims about geological history and European intellectuals were raising questions concerning the mythical stories in the Book of Genesis, the foundation of Christianity. The story is also a satiric look at the vanities and shallowness of the middle class. In his dissection of character and social class, Machado de Assis tends to emphasize the negative qualities of a class of people that had become self-satisfied, parasitic, and cowardly. His use of irony and ambiguity links him to other modern writers who also take a slanted or fragmented view of reality.

#### ■ CONNECTIONS

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions*, p. 827. With the rise of science in the nineteenth century, intellectuals began to question the historical truth of religious texts like the Bible. In *The Woman's Bible*, Stanton queries the ways in which gender appears in the Bible and whether women enjoy equality in the Bible or are relegated to second-class status. How does Machado de Assis call the

**www** For links to more information about Machado de Assis and a quiz on "Adam and Eve," see *World Literature Online* at [bedfordstmartins.com/worldlit](http://bedfordstmartins.com/worldlit).

Adam and Eve story into question? Does he think women should be blamed for the world's evil?

Rabindranath Tagore, *Broken Ties*, p. 0000. Intellectual pursuits can lead to critical inquiry and eventually to knowledge, but they can also be superficial, frivolous, and faddish. Tagore portrays both kinds in *The Broken Ties* and shows the dangers of intellectual fads. Machado de Assis appears to approach religious questions more indirectly. How does he expose the shallowness of several characters in his story?

Molière, *Tartuffe* (Book 4). Writers make use of social situations—interactions between characters—to make statements about the relative health of a society. Molière is an expert at setting up situations that unveil the hidden qualities of his characters. How does Machado de Assis make use of the plantation party to give readers insight into his characters?

#### ■ FURTHER RESEARCH

##### Biography

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#### ■ PRONUNCIATION

Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis: wah-KEEM mah-REE-ah mah-CHAH-thoh thay ah-SEES

## Adam and Eve

Translated by Jack Schmitt and Lorie Ishimatsu

It was some time during the 1700s that the wife of a Bahian<sup>1</sup> plantation owner, who had invited several intimate friends to dinner, announced a special kind of dessert to one of the guests, who was known to be quite a glutton. He immediately wished to know what it was, and the lady of the house called him a curious fellow. Nothing else was neces-

*"Adam and Eve."* Machado de Assis provided critical distance for his readers by placing this story in the 1700s, and yet the authenticity of the Scriptures was an agonizingly current topic for thinking individuals in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In his story, dinner guests are discussing Adam and Eve and the source of sin. For hundreds of years Western men had blamed women for

<sup>1</sup>Bahian: Bahia is a state in the southern half of Brazil.

sary—shortly thereafter, everyone was discussing curiosity, whether it was a masculine or a feminine trait and whether Adam or Eve was responsible for the fall from Paradise. The ladies said it was Adam's fault, and the gentlemen said it was Eve's. The judge didn't say anything and Father Bento, a Carmelite priest, replied with a smile when his hostess, Dona Leonor, asked for his opinion: "I, my dear lady, play the viola." He wasn't lying, for he was no less distinguished as a violist and harpist than as a theologian.

When the judge was called upon, he responded that there was no basis for forming an opinion, because the fall from Paradise did not occur in the way it is told in the first book of the Pentateuch,<sup>2</sup> which is apocryphal.<sup>3</sup> Amid the general astonishment, there was laughter from the Carmelite, who knew that the judge was one of the most pious men in the city and also that he was jovial, inventive, and even quite a joker, as long as matters remained priestly and refined. In serious matters, he was very serious.

"Father Bento," said Dona Leonor, "tell Senhor Veloso to be quiet."

"I won't tell him to be quiet," replied the priest, "because I know that everything he says is well intentioned."

"But the Scriptures . . ." said the army commander, João Barbosa.

"Let's leave the Scriptures in peace," interrupted the Carmelite. "Naturally, Senhor Veloso is acquainted with other books . . ."

"I know the authentic version of the story," insisted the judge, as he took the plate of sweets Dona Leonor offered him, "and I am ready to tell you what I know, as long as you do not ask me to do otherwise."

"Go on, please tell us!"

"This is how it really happened. In the first place, it wasn't God who created the world, it was Satan . . ."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the ladies.

"Don't say that name," requested Dona Leonor.

"Yes, it seems that . . ." intervened Father Bento.

"Let's call him the Evil One, then. It was the Evil One who created the world, but God, who could read his thoughts, allowed him to act freely but took care to emend and polish his work, so that salvation or charity would not be left vulnerable to the forces of evil. Divine action soon appeared, because after the Evil One created darkness, God created light, and that is how the first day was created. On the second day,

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the Fall, the event that introduced sin into the world through the temptation of Eve. In Machado de Assis's alternative version of the Genesis story, the serpent is a female, a change that alters the serpent's dynamics with Eve. The final irony, of course, is that with Eve in heaven, there can be no beautiful and powerful women descendants of hers on earth.

The guests appear to be stymied by the judge's challenge to think seriously about the Adam and Eve story. Many readers today are more willing to see the story in mythic or symbolic terms, but Machado de Assis's audience was undoubtedly less experienced in religious debate. Are the judge and the priest the only ones who can entertain a serious discussion about creation? Does the biblical version make any more sense than Machado de Assis's story?

<sup>2</sup> Pentateuch: The first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures, beginning with the Book of Genesis.

<sup>3</sup> apocryphal: Questionable or doubtful with regard to authorship and doctrine.

when the waters were created, storms and hurricanes were born, but the gentle afternoon breezes descended from divine thought. On the third day, the earth was created, and from it sprang forth the plants, but only those that bear no fruit or flowers: the thorny ones, and the deadly ones, like the hemlock. However, God created the fruit-bearing trees and the plants that nourish or are pleasing to man. Since the Evil One had hollowed out abysses and caverns in the earth, God created the sun, the moon, and the stars—such was the fourth day's work. On the fifth day, the animals of the earth, water, and air were created. We are now approaching the sixth day, and here I ask for your undivided attention."

It wasn't necessary to ask for it, for everyone was staring at him with curiosity.

Veloso continued, saying that on the sixth day Man was created, and Woman soon afterward. Both of them were beautiful, but they possessed only base instincts and lacked souls, which the Evil One could not give them. God infused souls into them with one breath, and noble, pure sentiments with another. Divine grace did not stop there—God caused a garden of delights to sprout forth and led Adam and Eve there, granting them possession of everything. Both fell at the Lord's feet, spilling forth tears of gratitude.

"You will live here," the Lord said to them, "and you may eat all fruits except the ones from this tree, which is the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil."

Adam and Eve listened submissively, and when they were left alone, stared at each other in amazement—it seemed that both of them had become different people. Before God granted her noble feelings, Eve had contemplated tying Adam up with a rope, and Adam had desired to beat her. Now, however, they were absorbed in contemplation of one another and the splendid natural scenery. Never before had they known air so pure, water so fresh, or flowers so beautiful and fragrant, nor did the sun spill forth such torrents of light anywhere else. Hand in hand they roamed, laughing heartily at first, because until then they had not known how to laugh. They had no conception of time, and thus their idleness did not give way to tedium—they lived in a state of contemplation. In the evenings they went to see the sun set and the moon rise and counted the stars. It was seldom that they were able to count even a thousand, for they usually fell asleep and slept like two angels.

Naturally, the Evil One became furious when he discovered all this. He couldn't go to Paradise because everything there was averse to him, nor could he bring himself to confront the Lord. Then, hearing a rustling of dry leaves on the ground, he looked down and saw a serpent. Excited by this discovery, he called to her: "Come here, snake, you creeping bile, venom of venoms, will you be your father's ambassador and reclaim his works?"

With her tail, the serpent made a vague gesture that seemed to be affirmative. The Evil One gave her the power of speech, and she answered that yes, she would go wherever he might send her—to the stars, if he would give her the wings of an eagle; to the sea, if he would reveal to her the secret of breathing under water; to the depths of the earth, if he would teach her the talents of the ant. The malign one rambled on without pause, content and extravagant with her speech, but the Evil One interrupted her: "Nothing like that, not to the air, the sea, or the depths of the earth, only to the Garden of Delights, where Adam and Eve live."

"Adam and Eve?"

"Yes, Adam and Eve."

"Two beautiful creatures we saw some time ago, walking as straight and tall as palm trees?"

"The very same ones."

"Oh, I detest them! Adam and Eve? No, no, send me somewhere else. I detest them! The mere sight of them makes me sick. You won't want me to do them any harm . . ."

"But I do!"

"Really? Then I'll go, I'll do whatever you wish, my lord and father. Now hurry and tell me what you want me to do. Bite Eve's heel? I'll bite . . ."

"No," interrupted the Evil One. "I want exactly the opposite. There is a tree in the garden, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, which they are forbidden to touch and whose fruits they are forbidden to eat. Go, coil yourself up in this tree, and when one of them passes by, call to him gently, pick up one of the fruits, and offer it to him, saying it is the most delicious fruit in the world. If he refuses, you will insist that he take it, saying that he needs only to eat it in order to learn the secret of life itself. Go, go . . ."

"I'll go, but I won't speak to Adam, I'll speak to Eve. I'll go, I'll go. Do you really mean the secret of life itself?"

"Yes, that's right. Go forth, serpent of my flesh, flower of evil, and if you are successful, I swear you'll possess the human part of creation, which is the best part, because you'll have the heels of many Eves to bite and the blood of lots of Adams in which to inject the virus of evil. Go, go, and don't forget . . ."

Forget? She already knew everything by heart. She went and entered the earthly paradise, slithered over to the Tree of Knowledge, coiled herself up, and waited. Eve appeared shortly afterward, walking gracefully and alone, with the confidence of a queen who knows no one will rob her of her crown. Torn with envy, the serpent was about to summon poison to her tongue, but she remembered she was there at the Evil One's orders and called Eve with a honeyed voice. Eve was startled.

"Who is calling me?"

"It is I, I'm eating this fruit . . ."

"You wretch! That's the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil!"

"That's right. I know everything now, the origin of things and the secret of life. Go on, take a bite, and you'll gain great powers on earth."

"No, you treacherous snake!"

"You fool! How can you refuse the splendor of the ages? Listen to me, do as I say, and you'll be legion, you'll found cities, and your name will be Cleopatra, Dido, Semiramis.<sup>4</sup> Heroes will be born of your womb and you'll be Cornelia.<sup>5</sup> You'll hear a

<sup>4</sup> Cleopatra . . . Semiramis: Cleopatra (69?–30 B.C.E.) was the enchanting queen of Egypt. Dido was the mythic founder and queen of Carthage, in North Africa. Semiramis was the beautiful, wise legendary queen of Assyria who founded Babylon circa ninth century B.C.E.

<sup>5</sup> Cornelia: Roman matron of the second century B.C.E. devoted to her sons, Gaius and Tiberius Gracchus, who became powerful Roman statesmen.

voice from Heaven and you'll be Deborah.<sup>6</sup> You'll sing and you will be Sappho.<sup>7</sup> And one day, should God wish to descend to earth, He will choose your body, and your name will be Mary of Nazareth. What more could you desire? Royalty, poetry, divinity—you're giving up everything because of a foolish obedience. And that's not all. Nature will make you even more beautiful. The brilliant as well as the pale colors of the leaves, the sky, and the night will be reflected in your eyes. The night, in competition with the sun, will revel in your hair. The children of your womb will weave for you the most wonderful garments, create the finest perfumes, and the birds will give you their feathers, the earth its flowers, everything, everything, everything . . ."

Eve listened impassively. Adam arrived, listened to the serpent, and reaffirmed Eve's responses: nothing was worth the risk of losing Paradise, not knowledge, power, or any other earthly illusion. As they said this, they clasped hands and turned away from the serpent, who hurriedly exited to report back to the Evil One . . .

God, who had heard everything, said to Gabriel: "Go, My archangel, descend to the earthly paradise where Adam and Eve live, and take them to eternal bliss, which they deserve for their resistance to the Evil One's temptations."

Then the archangel, placing on his head the helmet which glittered like a thousand suns, traversed the heavens in an instant, reached Adam and Eve, and said to them: "Hail, Adam and Eve. Come with me to Paradise, which you have earned for your resistance to the Evil One's temptations."

Astonished and confused, Adam and Eve bowed their heads in obedience, and Gabriel held out his hands to them. The three ascended to the eternal abode, where hosts of singing angels awaited them.

"Come in, come in. The earth you abandoned is now left to the Evil One's creations, the ferocious and malevolent animals, the harmful and poisonous plants, the unclean air, the swamps. The creeping, vile, biting serpent will reign over the earth, and no creatures like you will ever bring a note of hope and piety to such an abomination."

And that was how Adam and Eve entered Heaven—to the sound of all its zithers, which united their notes in a hymn to the two apostates from Creation . . .

. . . His story finished, the judge handed his plate to Dona Leonor so she could give him more dessert, while the other guests stared at one another in amazement—instead of an explanation, they had heard a puzzling narration, or at least a story without apparent meaning. Dona Leonor was the first to speak: "I was right when I said Senhor Veloso was fooling us. He didn't do what we asked him to do, and it didn't happen the way he said it did. Isn't that right, Father Bento?"

"The honorable judge will know the answer to that," replied the Carmelite, smiling.

And as the judge lifted a spoonful of dessert to his mouth, he said: "On second thought, I don't think any of it actually occurred, but, Dona Leonor, if it had, we wouldn't be here enjoying this dessert, which is in all sincerity perfectly delicious! Is it the work of your old pastry cook from Itapagipe?"<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Deborah: In Hebrew Scriptures, Deborah was a prophetess and one of the judges of Israel (see Judges 4–5).

<sup>7</sup> Sappho: A famous Greek poet of the ancient world (c. 600 B.C.E.).

<sup>8</sup> Itapagipe: A small town in the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil.