

Literary Confluences between Edgar Allan Poe and Machado De Assis: A Comparative Analysis Between “The Tell-Tale Heart” and “O Enfermeiro”

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Abstract

*This article intends to analyze the confluences between Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) and the Brazilian writer Machado de Assis (1839-1908), based on the comparison between “The Tell-Tale Heart” (1843) and the short-story “O enfermeiro” (“The Attendant’s Confession”), published in the volume titled *Várias Histórias (Various Stories)* in 1896, and translated by Isaac Goldberg in 2013. In the first part of the article, I’ll analyze Machado’s interest in Poe’s works, which appears in many references in his stories, as well as in the famous translation of the poem “The Raven”, published in *A Estação* in 1883. In the second part of the article, I’ll compare the two stories in respect to Machado’s adaptation of Poe when it comes to metaphorical criticism against Brazilian literature and society at that time, that continued to imitate old models instead of searching for its own identity. The conclusion is that Machado adapted Poe in his search for this identity due to his interest in North-American political aspects that transformed the United States as a parameter to be followed by Brazil in the 19th century.*

Keywords: literary identity; literary imitation; adaptation; short-story; translation.

1. Introduction

In June 2, 1878, in a chronicle which belongs to the series entitled *Notas semanais*, Machado de Assis points to the existence of political relationships between Brazil and the United States by using the metaphor of a flirt which has to be corresponded so that these relationships could develop in a full and productive way:

That the United States begins to court us, there is no doubt; let’s corresponding to the courtesy, flower by flower, glance by glance, squeeze by squeeze. Let’s conjugate our interests, and also a little of our feelings; for these there is a link, which is freedom; for those there’s another, which is work, and what are work and freedom besides the men’s great necessity? With one and the other we conquer science, prosperity and public venture. This new navigation streamline seems not to be a simple ship line. We already know better the United States; and they already begin to know us better. Let’s know each other fully, and the advantages will be common. (Assis, 2008, p.95) (my translation).

The chronicle refers to the inauguration of the boat *United States Steam Ships*, which linked Rio de Janeiro and New York in a trip that would last, approximately, 22 days. The Machadian fascination by the United States was related to a rising interest, nurtured by Brazilian elites from the decade of 1870 onwards, by a nation that had conquered independence in 1776 and abolished slavery during the Civil War, occurred between the years of 1860 and 1865. It was possible to observe, also, a consistent effort to question and problematize French hegemony in both Brazilian culture and literature at that time, and the interest by the United States and by North-American writers can be interpreted as a way of deconstructing this hegemony. The presence of France in Brazilian 19th century was undeniable, as the majority of English and North-American literary works arrived in Brazil through French translation and Jean-Baptiste Louis Garnier, the most famous Brazilian editor at that time, was French and printed his periodical *Jornal das Famílias* in Paris. There were also imaginary representations of France as the old world, in spite of the modernity it appeared to transmit, and America as a new world to be explored in economic, cultural and political aspects.

The flirt between Brazil and the United States appears in Machado’s literary texts since 1866, the year in which he refers explicitly to Edgar Allan Poe in one of his short-stories, “A miraculous excursion”. In this story, Poe is mentioned as the writer of “extraordinary stories”, reinforcing a stereotype which pervades Poe’s critical studies. The reference to “The Man of the Crowd” will appear twenty years after, in 1886, in the short-story “Alone”, published in *Gazeta de Notícias*:

In one of his admirable stories, a great writer, Edgar Poe, writes of an unknown man's nocturnal run through the streets of London with the visible purpose of never being alone as the streets become deserted. "This old man", he concludes, "is the type and the genius of deep crime. He is *the man of the crowd*." Bonifácio wasn't capable of committing crimes, nor was he looking for crowded places, so much so that he confined himself in an empty house. (Assis, 2016, p. 499)

It is possible to notice, in this reference, that Machado uses Poe's story to establish a distinction between the man of the crowd and Bonifácio. Throughout Machado's narrative, on the other hand, we will see that Bonifácio is very similar to Poe's character, as he is not able to stay alone for two days in a cottage in Andaraí, a city in the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro. But the most remarkable contact between Machado and Poe comes from the Brazilian writer's translation of "The Raven", published in the newspaper *A Estação* in 1883. This translation is considered polemic, as Machado would not have been faithful to Poe's original text, which had already been translated by Charles Baudelaire in 1853. There are claims according to which Baudelaire's translation would have distorted the meaning of Poe's texts, as the French poet was accused of plagiarism, as in the excerpt below:

I am being accused, I, of imitating Edgar Poe: Do you know why I translated Poe so patiently? Because he was like me. The first time I opened one of his books I was shocked and delighted to see not only subjects which I had dreamed of, but sentences which I had thought and which he had written twenty years before. (Baudelaire, 1997, p.13).

Baudelaire admits that there was a mysterious spiritual communion with Poe, which gave rise to the effort on translating all Poe's texts into French, including "The Raven" and the horror stories in *Tales of Grotesque and Arabesque*. Even though it was a poem, "The Raven" was translated into prose, which gives concrete signs of distortion in translation. Machado, by his turn, translated "The Raven" as poetry, reproducing, according to Jean Michel Massa (2008), the same mistakes of Baudelaire's translation, showing that he read this translation before doing his own. Recent research by Greicy Pinto Bellin (2018) shows that Machadian translation of "The Raven" can be interpreted as a conscious literary exercise through which Machado criticized French hegemony in Brazilian literature at that time, considering that he was a fluent reader of English with the help of his wife, Carolina. This means, therefore, that Machado consciously imitated Baudelaire's mistakes to show the dangers of French intermediation, as well as the subservience of Brazilian writers to European literature, something that happened frequently at that time.

The periodical *A Estação*, the same which published "The Raven" in 1883, would publish, in 1899, the novel *Quincas Borba*, which brings another reference to the poem in the passage in which Dona Tonica, one of the characters, sees Rubião, the main character of the story, looking at Sofia, the woman he is in love with:

Now, however, at night, on the occasion of the singing and the piano, Dona Tonica caught them taken with each other. She had no more doubts. They weren't apparently casual, brief looks, as up till that point, it was contemplation that shut out everything else in the room. Dona Tonica could hear the croak of the old raven of despair. *Quoth the Raven: NEVERMORE*. (Assis, 1998, p. 50)

The Machadian use of the image of the raven points to an outdated Romantic tradition by the time of the publication of *Quincas Borba*. What is also interesting to observe is that Tonica's fiancée, who will appear later in the narrative, dies days before the wedding party, signaling to Machado's adaptation of the theme of the man mourning the dead beloved woman. The presence of the raven points once more to the presence of French intermediation in Brazilian literature as a shadow that was still haunting this literature at the turning point of the XIX century, a period characterized by the Proclamation of Brazilian Republic and Abolition of Slavery. French intermediation, as mentioned, was observed in the arrival of Poe's works in Brazil, considering the problematic position of the North-American writer in the literary circles of his time. Known as having a harsh critical temper, directed to Longfellow and other representative figures of North-American literature, Poe's image suffered with the opinion of Rufus Griswold, even though he had included him in an anthology of American poetry published in 1842. Poe questioned some of the poets included in the anthology, marking the beginning of the long conflict which resulted in a harsh obituary after Poe's death, in which Griswold described Poe as cynical envious and arrogant and that he 'walked the streets, in madness or melancholy, with his lips moving with indistinct curses.' Poe had 'no moral susceptibility', he claimed, 'and what was more remarkable in a proud nature, little or nothing of the true point of honor'. The problem was that Griswold, a respected figure, carried a great deal of authority in literary matters and his views were listened to, and believed to be true. (Montague, 2015, p.160).

A new edition of *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, compiled by Griswold, arrived in bookshops in 1850, and the preface contained an extended version of Griswold's harsh obituary, which perceived Poe and a "drunken, depraved, amoral wastrel." (Montague, 2015, p. 160). Baudelaire's translations had the double impact of projecting the writer into an international context and transforming him into a genius with little or no concern with political issues, especially the ones related with the dynamics of North-American literature of his time.

The excerpts of some of Poe's critical essays signal that, in his opinion, there was not a correspondence between literary autonomy and 1776 political independence:

You are aware of the great barrier in the path of an American writer. He is read, if at all, in preference to the combined and established wit of the world. I say established; for it is with literature as with law or empire – an established name is an estate in tenure, or a throne in possession. Besides, one might suppose that books, like their authors, improve by travel – their having crossed the sea is, with us, so great a distinction. Our antiquaries abandon time for distance; our very fops glance from the binding to the bottom of the title page, where the mystic characters which spell London, Paris or Genoa, are precisely so many letters of recommendation. (Poe, 2004, p. 589).

In this excerpt, Poe uses the ironical expression. "letter of recommendation" to refer to European literary intermediation in a country that, almost like Brazil, occupied a peripheral position in the Western concert of nations in the 19th century, given that the cultural monopoly was held by France. Machado was concerned with similar issues, as he criticized not only Baudelaire's intermediation of Poe but also the Italian encenations of William Shakespeare's plays in Brazil, claiming that they distorted the meaning of these plays. The mention of Poe's "The Man of the Crowd" in the short-story "Alone" points to a complex textual game in which Poe is adapted by Machado to criticize the state of affairs in Brazilian literature of that time, a literature characterized by imitation and subservience. According to João Cezar de Castro Rocha (2013), the process of adaptation, which may also be called *emulation*, works as a textual strategy in which a writer establishes a dialogue with other writer to respond to the lack of equilibrium in situations of political power. In the case of Poe and Machado, this lack of equilibrium could be observed in the relationships between Brazilian and French literatures, North-American and English literatures, the reason why Machado will find in Poe a strong parameter for his works, as it will be possible to see in the comparative analysis of "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Attendant's Confession".

2. "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "O enfermeiro": a Productive Dialogue Between Brazilian and North-American Literatures

The first aspect of Poe's works adapted by Machado is related to the theory of the short-story as exposed by Poe in his "Review of Twice-Told Tales", according to which:

The tale proper, in our opinion, affords unquestionably the fairest field for the exercise of the loftiest talent, which can be afforded by the wide domains of mere prose. We are bidden to say how the highest genius could be most advantageously employed for the best display of its own powers, we should answer, without hesitation – in the composition of a rhymed poem, not to exceed in length what might be perused in an hour. Within this limit alone can the highest order of true poetry exist. We need only here say, upon this topic, that, in almost all classes of composition, the unity of effect or impression is a point of the greatest importance. It is clear, moreover, that this unity cannot be thoroughly preserved in productions whose perusal cannot be completed at one sitting. (Poe, 2004, p. 646).

Patrícia Lessa Flores da Cunha, in her doctoral dissertation about the influence of Poe over Machado de Assis (1998), argues that the theory of the short-story was largely absorbed by Machado, which can be proved by an extensive work consisted of short-stories, as well as by a preference by this genre instead of novels. Machado also cites Poe in the preface of *Várias Histórias (Various Histories)*, in which "The Attendant's Confession" was published, by saying that Poe was one of the greatest writers of America, and that one of the most remarkable qualities of short-stories is this length. It is important to emphasize that one copy of *The Works of Edgar Allan Poe* (1890) was found in Machado's library, and that this was an edition compiled by John Henry Ingram (1842-1916), the biographer dedicated to deconstruct the Griswold tradition around the works of Poe. There is, therefore, strong evidence that Machado did not see Poe with Griswold's eyes, and relied on Ingram's edition to get in contact with Poe's works, the reason he had a different view in relation to these works and focused on other aspects rather than not the ones responsible for transforming him into a gothic and alienated writer.

At first sight, "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Attendant's Confession" are very different from each other, more specifically when it comes to the tone of the narratives. While Poe's text sounds dramatic and tragic due to the disposition of the narrator, who oscillates between reason and sanity, Machado's text sounds ironic and sarcastic also due to its narrator, Procópio, who is dying and pleads an unknown reader not to publish his story until his death. The action of "The Attendant's Confession" takes place in 1860, the year that corresponds to the maximum point of slavery regime order in Brazil. Procópio is a free white man who lives with a priest and accepts to take care of Colonel Felisberto, bringing evidence of the establishment of favor relationships in Brazilian society at that time. A very significant information in this sense is Procópio's surname, Valongo, the name of a very famous pier in Rio de Janeiro, where black slaves used to land in America. The colonel even mocks him by saying that "Valongo" was "no Christian name", and proposes to call him Procópio only.

Throughout the story, it will be possible to observe that, in spite of being a free man, Procópio will become a slave of colonel Felisberto, a very cruel person who personifies the Brazilian elites which were part of the slave regime order at that time.

The Tell-Tale Heart” begins with the narrator’s altered state of humor, which differs completely from Machadian narrator:

True! – nervous – very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses – not destroyed – not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in heaven and Earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then, am I mad? Hearken! and observe how healthily – how calmly I can tell you the whole story. (Poe, 2004, p. 317).

What approximates the two narrators, in spite of the differences in their dispositions, is the borderline situation in which they are: Poe’s narrator is at the edge of madness, while Machado’s narrator is very close to death. Both of them have also in common the fact of taking care of old men:

It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain; but once conceived, it haunted me day and night. Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire. I think it was his eye! Yes, it was this! He had the eye of a vulture – a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees – very gradually – I made up my mind to take care the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever. (Poe, 2004, p. 317).

From the dawn of the eighth day I knew the life of my predecessor – a dog’s life. I no longer slept. I no longer thought of anything, I was showered with insults and laughed at them from time to time with an air of resignation and submission, for I had discovered that this was a way of pleasing him (...) He was nearly sixty, and since he had been five years old he had been accustomed to having everybody at his beck and call. That he was surly one could well forgive; but he was also very malicious. He took pleasure in the grief and humiliation of others. (Assis, 2013).

While Poe’s narrator says he hates the old man because of his eye, “the eye of a vulture – a pale blue eye, with a film over it”, Procópio claims he hates colonel Felisberto’s because of his temperament. It is clear in the narrative that Procópio knows this temperament when he accepts to take care of the man, though the perceptions come from other people: “he was pictured to me as disagreeable, harsh, exacting fellow; nobody could endure him, not even his old friends.” (Assis, 2013). It is also clear that Procópio accepts the job because he was “tired of copying Latin quotations and Ecclesiastic formulas”, and that the payment was good, which shows that he was a free white man who lived in state of dependency in relation to the others, more specifically people who belong to higher classes of society, as it is the case of Colonel Felisberto and the priest from Nictheroy, “an old collgee-chum, who thus tactfully gave me my board and lodging”. The idea of favor exchange is not clear in Poe’s narrative, because the narrator claims he is not interested in the old man’s money, and because the plot is much more focused on the psychological processes of the narrator’s mind, as well as his procedures for calculating a way of killing the old man:

And every night, about midnight, I turned the latch of his door and opened it – oh so gently! And then, when I had made an opening sufficient for my head, I out in a dark lantern, all closed, closed, so that no light shone out, and then I thrust in my head. Oh, you would have laughed to see how cunningly I thrust it in! I moved it slowly – very, very slowly, so that I might not disturb the old man’s sleep. It took me one hour top lace my whole head within the opening so far that I could see him as he lay upon his bed. Ha! – would a madman have been so wise as this? (Poe, 2004, p. 317).

As mentioned before, he hates the man because of his “Evil Eye”. According to a note by Gary Richard Thompson for “The Tell-Tale Heart”, a person with an “Evil Eye” “is said to have the power to inflict pain or injury, cause ill luck, or cast a spell by the fixed stare of the eye.” (Poe, 2004, p. 318). At the end, the “Evil Eye” turns out to be a metonymy of the man’s supposed bad temper, as this characteristic is not clear in the narrative. Based on this information, it would be possible to approximate the man and Colonel Felisberto, as both of them are bad people who are hated by young men taking care of them. After a fight when Procópio decides to leave the colonel and come back to the city, Felisberto begs him to stay: “Under no circumstances will I excuse you. You shall go, you shall pray over my tomb. And if you don’t”, he added, laughing, “my ghost will come at night and pull you by he legs. Do you believe in souls of the other world, Procópio? (Assis, 2013).

This excerpt brings the idea of casting a spell, expressed in the old man’s threat, which permits the establishment of relationships between him and the eye of man in Poe’s narrative. Also, it allows us to read Machado’s narrative as a parody or an adaptation of the fantastic genre that was practiced by Poe, more specifically when it comes to psychological terror, inflicted in Procópio by Colonel Felisberto.

This terror is also felt by the old man in “The Tell-Tale Heart”, when it seems he feels threatened by the narrator: Presently I heard a slight groan, and I knew it was ther groan of mortal terror. It was not a groan of pain of grief – oh, no! – it was the low stifled sound that arises from the bottom of the soul when overcharged with awe. I knew the sound well. Many a night, just at midnight, when all the world slept, it has welled up from my own bosom, deepening, with its dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me (...) I knew that he had been lying awake ever since the first slight noise, when he had turned in the bed. His fears hadever been since growing upon him (...) Death, in approaching him had stalked with its black shadow before him, and enveloped the victim. (Poe, 2004, p. 318).

Suspense characterizes both narratives as both narrators, one in his stalk to kill the man, and the other with his threats to leave colonel Felisberto, describe their difficult relationships with the old, as they are young and seeking for liberty. The suspense is intensified by the briefness which characterizes the genre of the short-story, something which, as it has already bem mentioned, signals Machado’s adaptation from Poe, so that the reader may not only read the story “at one sitting”, but also not to give up reading because is curious to know how the story will end. The tension reaches its maximum point when Poe’s narrator decides to finally kill the old man:

With a loud yell, I threw open the lantern and leaped into the room. He shrieked once – once only. In an instant I dragged him to the floor, and pulled the heavy bed over him. I then smiled gaily, to find the deed so far done. But, for many minutes, the heart beat on with a mullfed sound. This, however, did not vex me; it would not be heard through the wall. At lenght it ceased. The old man was dead. I removed the bed and examined the corpse. Yes, he was stone, sone dead. (Poe, 2004, p. 319).

Colonel Felisberto, on the other hand, is murdered at Procópio’s legitimate defense, after a strong attack of anger and after being awaken late by the narrator, who slept while reading a book:

I was to awake fim at midnight to give him his medicine; bt, whether it was due to fatigue or to the influence of the book, I, too, before reaching the second page, fell asleep. The cries of the colonel awoke me with a start; in an instant I was up. He, apparently in a delirium, continued to utter the same cries; finally he seized his water-bottle and threw it at my face. I could not get out of the way in time; the bottle hit me in the left cheek, and the pain was so acute that I almost lost consciousness. With a leap I rushed upon the invalid; I tightened my hands around his neck; he struggled several moments; I strangled him. When I beheld that he no longer breathed, I stepped back in terror. I cried out; but nobody heard me. Then, approaching the bed once more, I shook him so as to bring him back to life. It was too late; the aneurism had burst, and the colonel was dead. (Assis, 2013).

Concrete textual signs of Machado’s reading of Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart” will appear in the next scene, when Procópio, in a delirium, sees “faces grinning on the walls” and listens to “muffled voices”. He even has auditory hallucinations: The cries of the victim, the cries uttered before the struggle and during its wild moments continued to reverberate within me, and the air, in whatever direction I turned, seemed to shake with convulsions. Do not imagine that I am inventing pictures or aiming at verbal style. I swear to you that I heard distinctly voices that were crying at me: "Murderer; Murderer!"(Assis, 2013).

The spell of the Colonel is, therefore, made real, reinforcing the fantastic component of the narrative and bringing strong evidence that Machado read Poe’s narrative to compose his own. Both narrators also deal with the men’s corpses after the murders: Procópio helps with the preparations for the funeral, while Poe’s narrator decides to dismember the corpse and hide it in the flooring of the chamber:

I laid out the corpse myself, with the assistance of an old, near-sighted negro. I remained continually in the room of the dead. I trembled lest something out of the way should be discovered. I wanted to assure myself that no mistrust could be read upon the faces of the others; but I did not dare to look any person in the eye. Everything made me impatient; the going and coming of those who, on tip-toe crossed the room; their whisperings; the ceremonies and the prayers of the vicar.... The hour having come, I closed the coffin, but with trembling hands, so trembling that somebody noticed it and commented upon it aloud, with pity. "Poor Procopio! Despite what he has suffered from his master, he is strongly moved." It sounded like irony to me. I was anxious to have it all over with. (Assis, 2013).

If you stll think me mad, you will think so no longer when I describe the wise precautions I took for the concealment of the body. The night waned, and I worked hastily, but in silence. First of all I dismembered the corpse. I cut off the head and the arms and the legs. I then took up three planks from the flooring of the chambre and deposited it all between the scantlings. I then replaced the boards so cleverly, so cunningly, that no human eye – not even his – could have detected any thing wrong. There was nothing to wash out no stain of any kind – no blood-spot whatever. I had been too wary for that. A tub had caught all – ha! Ha! (Poe, 2004, p. 320).

Irony appears in the two excerpts – the first, with the idea of Procópio as a victim of the situation, as people do not know he is the murderer, and in the second, with the strategies used by the narrator to hide the man's corpse as the counterpart of the insanity which led him to commit the crime. Procópio is chased by guilt, as well as with the fear of being caught, so much so that he decides to spend some more days in the city instead of coming back to the court. After the burial, his disposition is not good at all:

But I was not at peace with my conscience, and the first nights, naturally, I spent in restlessness and affliction. Need I tell you that I hastened to return to Rio de Janeiro, and that I dwelt there in terror and suspense, although far removed from the scene of the crime? I never smiled; I scarcely spoke; I ate very little; I suffered hallucinations and nightmares.... "Let the dead rest in peace," they would say to me. "It is out of all reason to show so much melancholy." And I was happy to find how people interpreted my symptoms, and praised the dead man highly, calling him a good soul, surly, in truth, but with a heart of gold. And as I spoke in such wise, I convinced myself, at least for a few moments at a time. (Assis, 2013).

Irony is once more evident, showing people's hypocrisy, as they knew Colonel Felisberto's personality but began to praise him after his death. Procópio also has a mass sung in the memory of the Colonel, in order to ease the burden of his consciousness, very differently from Poe's narrator, who is visited by the police in his house after finishing his macabre service:

When I had made an end of these labors, it was four o'clock – still dark as midnight. As the bell sounded the hour, there came a knocking at the street door. I went down to open it with a light heart – for what had I now to fear? There entered three men, who introduced themselves, with perfect suavity, as officers of the police. A shriek had been heard by a neighbor during the night; suspicion of foul play had been aroused; information had been lodged at the police office, and they (the officers) had been deputed to search the premises. (Poe, 2004, p. 320).

The narrator feels so confident that he allows the police officers to search evidence of crime all over the house, claiming that the old man "was absent in the country" (Poe, 2004, p. 320). Convinced of his triumph, he places a seat "upon the very spot beneath which reposed the corpse of the victim." (Poe, 2004, p. 320). Machado's narrator, on the other hand, seems to feel guilty due to the murder he committed: I wished to deceive nobody. The proof of this lies in the fact that I did all this without letting any other know. To complete this incident, I may add that I never mentioned the colonel without repeating, "May his soul rest in peace!" And I told several funny anecdotes about him, some amusing caprices of his ... (Assis, 2013).

This excerpt proves the similarity between the two stories, more specifically when it comes to the use of irony as a literary strategy according to which both Machado and Poe will criticize young societies like the Brazilian and the North-American ones, whose independences were recently conquered at that time but whose literatures and cultural backgrounds were still extremely dependent on the Old World, I mean, Europe, which is symbolized by the old men. In Poe's story, the narrator's youth is reinforced not only by his strong desire to get rid of the man, but also by the arrogance and the extreme confidence in his acts after committing the crime:

The officers were satisfied. My manner had convinced them. I was singularly at ease. They sat, and while I answered cheerily, they chatted of familiar things. But, ere long, I felt myself getting pale and wished them gone. My head ached, and I fancied a ringing in my ears: but still they sat and still chatted. The ringing became more distinct: - it continued and became more distinct: I talked more freely to get rid of the feeling: but it continued and gained definitiveness – until, at length, I found that the noise was *not* within my ears. (Poe, 2004, p. 320).

In this part of the story, Poe uses the fantastic to deal with the conflict of the young man who discovers he is unable to get rid of the old structures symbolized by cultural and literary colonization. He makes a strong effort not to hear the ringing in his ears, which is actually the beating of the old man's heart, showing his undeniable will to be free of the domain of the ancient world of Europe, which still suffocated American young artists in their search for literary identity. As mentioned in the beginning of this article, both Poe and Machado were aware of the remaining literary European domination over Brazilian and North-American literatures, so much so that they found metaphorical ways of expressing their concerns. The beating of the old man's heart in Poe's story shows that the old literary structures were still surviving, and it has a parallel in Colonel Felisberto's legacy to Procópio at the end of Machado's story:

Thus, by a strange irony of fate, all the colonel's wealth came into my hands. At first I thought of refusing the legacy. It seemed odious to take a sou of that inheritance; it seemed worse than the reward of a hired assassin. For three days this thought obsessed me; but more and more I was thrust against this consideration: that my refusal would not fail to awake suspicion. Finally I settled upon a compromise; I would accept the inheritance and would distribute it in small sums, secretly. This was not merely scruple on my part, it was also the desire to redeem my crime by virtuous deeds; and it seemed the only way to recover my peace of mind and feel that accounts were straight. (Assis, 2013).

The earning of the colonel's legacy arises the suspicion that Procópio murdered the old man purposefully, even though the reader is aware that he really hated the colonel. He even starts to doubt the nature of his crime:

Crime or struggle? Really, it was rather a struggle; I had been attacked, I had defended myself; and in self-defence.... It had been an unfortunate struggle, a genuine tragedy. This idea gripped me. And I reviewed all the abuse he had heaped upon me; I counted the blows, the names ... It was not the colonel's fault, that I knew well; it was his affliction that made him so peevish and even wicked. But I pardoned all, everything!... The worst of it was the end of that fatal night ... I also considered that in any case the colonel had not long to live. His days were numbered; did not he himself feel that? Didn't he say every now and then, "How much longer have I to live? Two weeks, or one, perhaps less? "This was not life, it was slow agony, if one may so name the continual martyrdom of that poor man.... And who knows, who can say that the struggle and his death were not simply a coincidence? That was after all quite possible, it was even most probable; careful weighing of the matter showed that it couldn't have been otherwise. At length this idea, too, engraved itself upon my mind.... (Assis, 2013).

After receiving the legacy, Procópio has the idea of distributing it to the poor, an idea that vanishes as time passes by: I gave away several insignificant sums to the poor; I presented the village church with a few new ornaments; I gave several thousand francs to the Sacred House of Mercy, etc. I did not forget to erect a monument upon the colonel's grave—a very simple monument, all marble, the work of a Neapolitan sculptor who remained at Rio until 1866, and who has since died, I believe, in Paraguay. (Assis, 2013).

By the end of the story, the colonel's death is justified by the inevitable death his own disease would cause. Poe's narrator, on the other hand, starts to listen to the louder and louder beating of the man's heart and is not cynic as Procópio was to hide his terrible crime: "Villains!" I shrieked, "dissemble no more! I admit the deed!- tear up the planks! – here, here! – it is the beating of his hideous heart!" (Poe, 2004, p. 321). The fantastic component is one more time reinforced by the narrator's auditive hallucinations, in which he believes the police officers are listening to the beating of the man's heart. This can be interpreted as the metaphor of the old shadows of cultural and literary past still haunting the narrator, but he is unable to resist to psychological pressure and ends up confessing his murder.

Machado's story, on the contrary, brings a very different situation in the representation of the young man who eliminates the old but inherits all his legacy, which forces him to live with its memory, confirming the threat according to which Colonel Felisberto would haunt Procópio after his death. Machado, therefore, uses Poe to dramatize the dilemmas of the young men who is trying to find his own identity but ends up accepting the burden of becoming rich with the constant remembrance of murder and unhappiness. The biggest question Machado's story leaves at its end is: could money buy the release of a burden in man's consciousness? For Poe the answer would probably be "no", as the first paragraph of "The Man of the Crowd" shows us: "Now and then, alas, the conscience of man takes up a burthen so heavy in horror that it can be thrown down only into the grave. And thus the essence of all crime is undivulged." (Poe, 2004, p. 232).

Closing Remarks

In spite of the considerable differences in approaching the themes of murder, guilt and madness, Machado certainly read Edgar Allan Poe's short-story to compose his own, which can be proved by the reference to Poe as a great American writer in the preface of *Várias Histórias*, in which "The Attendant's Confession" was published. The use of irony as a textual strategy consists in the main similarity between the two writers, even though Poe is much more tragic in his representations, dealing more directly with madness and the fantastic to represent the dilemma of the young man who kills the old man he hated because he had an "Evil eye". In both stories, the old men, who symbolize the old dominating structures in young nations like Brazil and the United States, will never die not because they do not want to, but because young men insist on keeping them alive either by listening to the beating of their hearts, or by earning a legacy which would allow his memory to persist forever.

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