

## "THE RAVEN", BY MACHADO DE ASSIS

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The Brazilian critic José Guilherme Merquior once claimed that Machado de Assis's translation of "The Raven" should not be considered inferior to the well known translation of the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately Merquior does not seem to find necessary to give reasons for this evaluation. And yet even the most cursory reading of the two translations will show that some sort of explanation is necessary because Machado and Pessoa are obviously doing something radically different with Poe's poem. Consider, for example, the two renderings of the first stanza in relation to Poe's original:

*Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,  
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore —  
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,  
As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door —  
"Tis some visitor," I muttered, "tapping at my chamber door —  
Only this and nothing more."<sup>2</sup>*

*Numa meia-noite agreste, quando eu lia, lento e triste,  
Vagos curiosos tomos de ciências ancestrais,  
E já que adormecia, ouvi o que parecia  
O som de alguém que batia levemente a meus umbrais.  
"Uma visita", eu me disse, "está batendo a meus umbrais.  
É só isto, e nada mais."<sup>3</sup>*

*Em certo dia, à hora, à hora  
 Da meia-noite que apavora,  
 Eu caindo de sono e exausto de fadiga,  
 Ao pé de muita lauda antiga.  
 De uma velha doutrina, agora morta  
 Ia pensando, quando ouvi à porta  
 Do meu quarto um soar devagarinho  
 E disse estas palavras tais:  
 "É alguém que me bate à porta de mansinho;  
 Há de ser isso e nada mais."*

The first striking difference between the two translations is the choice of metrical patterns. Pessoa's translation is a **tour-de-force** in that it tries to reproduce in Portuguese Poe's trochaic rhythm in lines of eight, seven and a half, and three and a half feet. As the Lines of sixteen, fifteen and seven syllables have approximately the same pauses and accents as the original, Pessoa's poem succeeds in producing a very close rhythmical resemblance to the English "Raven" and in capturing Poe's "magic of verse." Machado de Assis, on the other hand, changes Poe's rhythm very significantly: he chooses to render the poem in shorter lines of twelve, ten, and eight syllables. This drastic reduction of Poe's longer lines almost cancels the slow, smooth flow of the original. Whatever is left of this smooth rhythmic movement has to be found with difficulty in the twelve-syllable lines ("eu caindo de sono e exausto de fadiga") but of course all of Pessoa's longer lines capture this rhythmic effect with more precision ("vagos curiosos tomos de ciências ancestrais"). Machado, moreover, ignores throughout the powerful effect of Poe's internal rhymes. Thus in reading Pessoa's version one cannot fail to realize that he is at pains to reproduce the assonance of "dreary... weak and weary" in "agreste... eu lia, lento e triste," or the internal rhyme of "napping" and "tapping" in "adormecia" and "parecia". In Machado's rendering on the other hand internal rhymes are replaced by end-rhymes (aabbccdede) and by the strong binary rhythm of the ten and eight-syllable lines which, as I pointed out before, tend to replace Poe's (and Pessoa's) slow, smooth rhythm with a very quick and marked alternation of strong and weak accented syllables (as in "Em certo dia à hora à hora"). Finally, in the translation of the Brazilian writer, the stanza form that Pessoa so carefully maintains is radically changed:

Machado's are ten-line stanzas, as against the six-line stanzaic form of Poe and Pessoa.

Machado's translation, when compared to Pessoa's, falls short of achieving one of the two essential objectives in the translation of poetry, that of rendering as accurately as possible the sound patterns of the original. But it also falls short of achieving a second basic objective, that of translating sense. The comparison of almost any two lines in the two renderings will make this point apparent. Consider, for example, the first line of Pessoa's version. Evidently, an exact rendering of each and every word is more than any reasonable reader can ask from a translator. In the best of translations, here and there a word will not correspond to its equivalent in the original: "agreste" is not exactly "dreary" and "weak and weary" is not exactly "lento e triste". And yet most readers with a good command of both languages would probably agree that Pessoa's translation reproduces the original meaning as closely as one could reasonably wish. And if he does not produce an exact equivalent, that is also because, as his intention is to translate both the meaning and the rhythm simultaneously, and as these two effects can hardly be simultaneously rendered in a foreign language, he must at times sacrifice in part one or the other so that the final delicate balance of similar sound and sense is achieved. If "lia, lento e triste" does not have exactly the same meaning as "pondered, weak and weary", it does nevertheless re-create an equivalent to the original because what is missing in terms of sense is somehow compensated in terms of the similarity in assonance (thus the recurrence of the /l/ and /t/ sounds is analogous to the /wea/ sequence in English). No such attempt to match sound and sense is really to be found in Machado. "Apavora" is a much too strong verb to translate the dreariness of Poe's midnight and, likewise, to say "caindo de sono e exausto de fadiga" is quite different from what is conveyed by "weak and weary". Many other examples could of course be mentioned, but these are as good as any to suggest that Machado is definitely **not** trying to reproduce an equivalent of sound and sense in Portuguese in the way that Pessoa obviously is. The word "translation" when applied to poetry seems in no way to mean the same thing to these two major writers of Portuguese-Brazilian literature.

The meaning of "translation" for Pessoa is made clear in his **Páginas de Estética e de Teoria e Crítica Literárias**. "A poem", he says,

*is an intellectualized impression, or an idea made emotion, communicated to others by means of a rhythm. This rhythm is double in one, like the concave and convex aspects of the same arc: it is made up of a verbal or musical rhythm and of visual or image rhythm, which concurs inwardly with it. The translation of a poem should therefore conform absolutely (1) to the idea or emotion which constitutes the poem, (2) to the verbal rhythm in which that idea or emotion is expressed; it should conform relatively to the inner or visual rhythm, keeping to the images themselves when it can, but keeping always to the type of image. It was on this criterion that I based my translations into Portuguese of Poe's "Annabel Lee" and "Ulalume", which I translated, not because of their great intrinsic worth, but because they are a standing challenge to translators.<sup>5</sup>*

Translation is then for Pessoa the attempt to reproduce in a second language the balance between idea and verbal rhythm of the original. In the case of the translations of Poe (including "The Raven", even though Pessoa does not mention it in the fragment quoted above), this attempt means no more than a challenge, an exercise in craftsmanship by means of which he tests his command of poetic discourse in his native language, as Pessoa does not believe in the great intrinsic value of Poe's poems.

Machado, on the other hand, shows no intention of reproducing in Portuguese Poe's correspondence of sound and sense. In fact, his intention seems to be to ignore it. One might perhaps explain this failure to produce accurate translation as a result of Machado's relatively poor command of English as opposed to Pessoa's accomplished knowledge as evinced, for example, in his **English Sonnets**. If this explanation is accepted, then Machado was simply mistranslating Poe because of his poor command of English. There are, however, at least two reasons to avoid dismissing his translation as just another translator's poor job. First, Machado deviates so often and so systematically from the original that it would be difficult to believe that these systematic deviations in

rhythm and sense are not intentional. Second, there is evidence enough to believe that his command of English was really quite good (although unquestionably inferior to Pessoa's) and that therefore he could have done a better job had he really set his mind to translating accurately Poe's poem. He had, after all, done a much better job in his translation of Shakespeare's "To be or not to be".<sup>6</sup>

There is method and purpose in Machado's deviations from Poe's original. He is not translating, he is doing something else. A closer look at the systematic changes produced by Machado on Poe's text will, I believe, show more clearly what this something is. Such a closer look, of course, must try to discover the ultimate cause of the Brazilian writer's "poor" translation in the new systematic patterns of meanings which resulted from conscious and intentional misreading. By misreading I understand here not only mistranslations of specific words and sentences, but also shifts of emphasis, expansions and reductions of the original sense and additions or subtractions of meaning. As a result of these misreadings, the general meaning of Poe's poem is curiously distorted and alternative interpretations are thus made possible. An example of this intentional distortion appears in stanza nine, when the speaker in the poem first reacts to the word "nevermore", spoken by the raven:

*Much I marvelled this ungainly fowl to hear discourse so plainly  
Though its answer little meaning — little relevancy bore;  
For we cannot help agreeing that no living human being  
Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his chamber door  
Bird or beast upon the sculptured bust above his chamber door,  
With such name as "Nevermore".*

*Vendo que o pássaro entendia  
A pergunta que lhe eu fazia,  
Fico atônito, embora a resposta que dera  
Difícilmente lhe entendera.  
Na verdade, jamais homem há visto  
Coisa na terra semelhante a isto:  
Uma ave negra, friamente posta  
Num busto, acima dos portais,  
Ouvir uma pergunta e dizer em resposta  
Que este é o seu nome: "Nunca mais."*

X Whereas the bereaved lover in Poe's poem marvels to hear the

bird speak, Machado's lover is surprised to find that the bird understands ("entendia") his question and answers it in a way that nevertheless defies his power of comprehension (embora a resposta que dera, difficilmente lhe entendera). Moreover, he fails to interpret it because, unlike the lover in Poe's poem, who is assured by reason that the raven is an irrational bird whose speech is meaningless, he believes there is something mysterious in a bird that **understands** the question and **answers** it with an ominous and mysterious "nunca mais". Poe's lover, in saying that "we cannot but help agreeing" that the event is improbable because the bird is "no living human being", uses his rational powers to understand what is happening to him. Machado's, on the other hand, avoids all overt reference to the bird's irrationality (the raven is only "uma ave negra, friamente posta") and sees it instead as endowed with a mystery which astonishes man (jamais homem há visto/cousa na terra semelhante a isto). In other words, the changes of meaning Machado imposes on the original tend to produce a shift of emphasis in his translation, if not altogether an almost entirely **novel** meaning in the sense that the lover is portrayed not as a bereaved man who is still rational enough to perceive a raven irrationally repeating a single melancholy word, but as the almost entirely passive victim of a bird that brings a dark, incomprehensible message.

This shift of emphasis significantly alters the general meaning of Poe's poem because, as Poe himself suggests in "The Philosophy of Composition", the disturbed state of mind of the lover mechanically mourning the loss of a beautiful woman is at least as important as (but possibly more important than) the bird that mechanically repeats "nevermore" and thus gives the lover the opportunity to enjoy all the more profound sorrow. As Poe puts it in describing these two main thematic concerns of the poem,

*I had now to combine the two ideas of a lover lamenting his deceased mistress and a raven continuously repeating the word "nevermore". I had to combine these, bearing in mind my design of varying, at every turn, the application of the word repeated; but the only intelligible mode of such combination is that of imagining the raven employing the word in answer to the queries of the lover. And here it was that I saw at once the opportunity afforded for the effect on which I had been depending — that is to say, the*

*effect of the variation of application. I saw that I could make the first query propounded by the lover — the first query to which the raven should reply "Nevermore" — that I could make this query a commonplace one — the second less so — the third still less, and so on — until at length the lover, startled from his original nonchalance by the melancholy character of the word itself — by its frequent repetition — and by a consideration of the ominous reputation of the fowl that uttered it — is at length excited to superstition, and wildly propounds queries of a far different character — queries whose solution he has passionately at heart — propounds them half in superstition and half in that species of despair which delights in self-torture — propounds them not altogether because he believes in the prophetic or demoniac character of the bird (which, reason assures him, is merely repeating a lesson learned by rote) but because he experiences a frenzied pleasure in so modeling his questions as to receive from the **expected** "nevermore" the most delicious because the most intolerable of sorrow.'*

Whatever doubts one may entertain as to whether **"The Philosophy of Composition"** is a true description of the creative process of composing the poem, this particular explanation of the weaving of the two main themes of the poem is basically accurate. Poe's poem is not so much about a raven as it is about the state of mind of a bereaved lover who uses an event he knows is meaningless in itself — a raven seeking admission to his chamber door in a stormy midnight — to ask "queries whose solution he has passionately at heart". Nor does he believe "in the prophetic or demoniac character of the bird": he uses the bird to ask questions to himself and to experience the "frenzied pleasure" of self-torture which results from the remembrance of loss.

All this emphasis on the inner drama of the lover does not mean of course that the raven is not structurally important for the meaning of the poem. In fact, as Poe himself explains in **"The Philosophy of Composition"**, in the two last stanzas of the poem the bird is instrumental in providing that undercurrent of suggestive meaning that he believes is required of all good poems. The stanzas should "dispose the mind to seek a moral in all that has been previously narrated. The reader begins now to regard the raven as emblematic... of mournful and neverending remembrance." But he hastens to add that "it is not until the very last line of the very last stanza that the intention of making him emblematic ... is permitted distinctly to be seen: ... 'And my soul **from** out

that shadow that lies floating on the floor/ Shall be lifted —  
nevermore.'"<sup>8</sup> The implication is that before the poetic touch of  
suggestiveness in the last two stanzas the raven had not been  
made emblematical by the lover-narrator of the poem and that only  
then, that is, in the last two stanzas, he realizes its possibility  
as a final, additional meaning meant to close the poem in  
suggestiveness. Once again, Poe is here giving a plausible  
explanation of his own poem, his main concern being to depict the  
inner drama and the state of mind of a lover suffering the loss  
of the woman he had loved and using the raven as a means to bring  
this drama to the surface.

There is then in the original poem a balance and a hierarchical  
ordering between raven and lover. Machado's translation of stanza  
nine alters this balance by putting the lover in a situation in  
which he almost passively receives the message of the raven and by  
making the latter the bearer of a mysterious message not easily  
comprehensible. Whereas Poe writes a poem about a bereaved lover  
who uses a raven and then makes it emblematical of undying  
remembrance, Machado re-writes Poe's poem as the story of a raven and  
its dark secret message to be conveyed to man. This new direction  
of meaning, moreover, is present not only in the ninth stanza of  
his translation, but also in the rest of the poem as well. Additions  
and suppressions of meaning, as well as reductions and expansions  
of the sense of the original tend as a rule to assent the  
significance of the raven and its dark secret. Unlike Poe, who  
tried to make his raven emblematical only in the final stanzas,  
Machado seems to be trying to make his raven symbolic not only of  
remembrance and loss throughout, but also and primarily a  
supernatural messenger bringing wisdom (and not merely repeating  
monotonously a word) to man. Thus in the sixth stanza Machado  
expands on Poe's meaning to suggest, from the start, that the  
lover expects a message from the raven. Whereas in hearing a  
"tapping" for the second time Poe's narrator suspects that it "is  
something at my window lattice", Machado's lover believes that "hã  
na janela/Alguna coisa que sussura." It is however in stanza  
eleven of the Brazilian writer's translation that the emphasis on  
the raven's wisdom appears more clearly:

startled at the stillness broken by reply so aptly spoken,  
 "Doubtless," said I "what it utters is its only stock and store  
 Caught from some unhappy master whom unmerciful Disaster  
 Followed fast and followed faster till his songs one burden bore  
 Till the dirges of his Hope that melancholy burden bore  
 Of 'Never--nevermore'"

*Estremeço. A resposta ouvida  
 É tão exata! é tão cabida!  
 "Certamente, digo eu, essa é toda a ciência  
 "Que ele trouxe da convivência  
 "De algum mestre infeliz e acobrunhado  
 "Que o implacável destino há castigado  
 "Tão tenaz, tão sem pausa, nem fadiga,  
 "Que dos seus cantos usava  
 "Só lhe ficou, na amarga e última cantiga,  
 "Esse estribilho: Nunca mais."*

What in Poe is "stock and store" becomes in Machado "toda a ciência" (all the knowledge) received from a "mestre" (a wise master) so relentlessly punished by a fate (destino) so persistent, constant and restless (tão tenaz, tão sem pausa, nem fadiga) that his songs have been reduced not simply, as in Poe, to "one burden", but to "one last and bitter song" (amarga e última cantiga) in which the refrain is "nevermore" (nunca mais).

The lover who receives this wisdom in Machado's poem is also different from the lover of the original. Poe's lover, though bereaved, is assured by reason that the raven is only an irrational bird that happens to be mechanically repeating a word he can respond to in a very particular way. Machado's lover, on the other hand, sees in the raven a wise messenger whose dark secret will eventually be revealed to him. He is not simply playing a game: he is seriously involved in a process of learning. In this respect it is interesting to notice that in the two contexts in which Poe refers to the raven as a bird that beguiles the narrator's fancy into smiling because of its unjustified "grave and stern decorum", Machado's translation significantly plays down the lover's perception of the raven as a mere bird by mistranslating "beguiling" and thus obscuring the lover's willingness to be deceived:

*Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling,  
 By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore (VIII)*

*But the raven still beguiling my sad fancy into smiling, (XII)*

*Diante da ave feia e escura  
N'aquela rígida postura,  
Com o gesto severo, — o triste pensamento  
Sorriu-me ali por um momento (VIII)*

*Segunda vez n'esse momento  
Sorriu-me o triste pensamento; (XII)*

Machado is here significantly reducing the implications of the relationship between bird and lover by erasing the forceful verb "beguile" and by replacing it by the juxtaposition of lover and bird: standing in front of the ugly dark bird, his sad fancy smiles. A further addition of meaning tends to weaken even more significantly what is perhaps for Machado an undesirable comic effect produced by the **decorous** countenance of an ugly bird: if a smile exists, it exists only "for a moment" (por um momento). Poe says in "The Philosophy of Composition" that "an air of the fantastic — approaching as nearly to the ludicrous as was admissible — is given to the raven's entrance."<sup>9</sup> Machado is evidently at pains to minimize this ludicrous effect, as his lover is more seriously involved in a process of learning than is Poe's.

The serious attention he devotes to this learning process is already made apparent early in the poem, in the third stanza. The "silken, uncertain rustling" of the purple curtains in the chamber does not merely thrill him "with fantastic terrors" as is the case in Poe. In Machado the curtains have a "sad, vague, soft rumor" (o rumor triste, vago, brando) which awakens in his heart an equivalent "still unknown, unexperienced rumor" he must respond to. Moreover, Machado will later explain this response in words that represent an addition to, and a significant expansion of, Poe's original meaning. Whereas in stanza XIII Poe's lover simply sits "engaged in guessing" the meaning of "nevermore", Machado's lover sits "wondering, meditating, conjecturing" (devaneando, meditando, conjecturando). None of these words in Portuguese, of course, is really equivalent to "guessing". They suggest rather the intense, careful attention of someone whose main concern is by no means, as in the case of Poe's original, a question of guesswork but rather a search for "the soul, the meaning, the terrifying secret/Of these fatal syllables":

... linking  
*Fancy unto fancy, thinking what this ominous bird of yore  
 What this grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt, and ominous bird of yore  
 Meant in croaking "Nevermore".*

*Achar procuro a lúgubre quimera  
 A alma, o sentido, o pálido segredo  
 D'aquelas sílabas fatais  
 Entender o que quiz dizer a ave do medo  
 Grasnando a frase: Nunca mais.*

What is then the dark secret message Machado's raven has to convey to his lover? As in Poe, the raven in Machado is emblematic of undying remembrance of loss. But as in Machado this emblematic meaning is not so much constructed by a distracted mind as perceived by it as a truth revealed, his translation tends to universalize and raise to cosmic proportions the drama of loss and despair of the human condition suddenly aware of the possibility of meaninglessness and nothingness at the center of existence. In other words, as in Machado meaninglessness is objectified in the raven and not, as in Poe, called forth by the lover's diseased mind, there is in his translation a certain sense of the universal tragedy of the human condition that is not so obvious in Poe. Machado, as it were, universalizes what in Poe is reduced to a more limited perception of human pain and loss. This trend toward universalization, moreover, appears not only in the altered relationship between raven and lover, but also in the frequent effort to make symbolic what in Poe is literal, descriptive meaning. Thus in the second stanza, for example, Machado translates "each separate dying ember" for "cada brasa do lar" (each **homely** ember) and in stanza XV "on this home by horror haunted" is rendered as "Nesta casa onde o horror, o horror profundo/Tem os seus lares triunfais". There is in the Brazilian writer, finally, a certain emphasis on blackness and terror that is unmatched in Poe. "Midnight dreary" thus becomes in Machado "a meia-noite que apavora", "surcease of sorrow" becomes "repouso à dor esmagadora" and "disaster followed fast and followed faster" is rendered as "o implacável destino há castigado/Tão tenaz, tão sem pausa nem fadiga" (stanzas I and II).

It is not impossible to see in Poe's original poem a statement about the purposelessness and meaninglessness of an

absurd universe devoid of values. If one chooses to read "The Raven" in this manner, then Poe is a precursor of the apocalyptic vision that would, in the twentieth century, characterize poems such as "The Waste Land". Louis D. Rubin Jr., for example, after observing that implied in each question of the lover "is an assertion of purpose, of meaning, of the reality of human love, affection, intelligence, thought, religion even" and that to each of these questions there is only as an answer "the automatic, senseless, memorized glottal response of a mindless dumb organism", goes on to suggest that in this mechanical, meaningless repetition there might be, by implication, a hint that the man asking questions is perhaps not really the learned, feeling rational lover but only a "somewhat more complex, more highly developed, but still essentially animal organism". And if this implication can indeed be read in Poe, then the nineteenth century author might indeed be anticipating some very crucial twentieth-century questions. If, indeed, as Rubin puts it, man is only an animal organism,

*then what of all the hopes, aspirations, ideals of society, what of all its brave assertions of divine purpose and meaning, its quest for greater knowledge, its belief in a logical and God-ordered universe, its faith in a society of progress, of men of good will, of institutions for perfection? Are these cherished goals too only mirages? Are the strength and comfort they have afforded men for thousands of years still available today? 'Nevermore'? <sup>10</sup>*

But this is of course Poe viewed from the perspective of the twentieth century. Rubin's reading depends on the possibility of ignoring the lover as a learned, rational being, a possibility which Poe himself does not favor in "The Philosophy of Composition". If this reading is perhaps doubtful in the case of Poe, it is certainly accurate in the case of Machado, as in the Brazilian writer's translation the lover tends to become a background against which the raven as conveyor of a dark message becomes clearly visible.

At this point one must return to the question of Machado's inaccurate against Pessoa's accurate translation. Whereas Pessoa translates, Machado seems to be consciously misreading Poe. The reason for this misreading, I believe, is to be found in Machado's

program for literary nationalism in Brazil. As Mário Curvello rightly observed, Machado felt very early in his career the predicament of the writer producing literature in the colony and was therefore at pains to understand and define the significance of Brazilian Literature in an international context.<sup>11</sup> This significance would of course depend on asking questions about the meaning of original literary production in a peripheral, that is, in a non-European country. How can a writer be original and establish the basis for the foundation of literary nationalism in the tropics if he is aware that this new beginning is doomed to arise in a problematic relationship of dependence on a previous origin represented by the Western Literary Tradition? Machado's career as a writer can be viewed in terms of the attempt to find an answer to this question of origins and beginnings. The dialectics of origin and beginning implies that the origin is a controlling point of departure which is not originated by anything and from which something naturally follows. In this sense "origin" is a theological concept, whereas "beginning" is a more secular or gentile concept derived from and opposed to origins. A beginning is a point of departure related to other points of departure (the origins) and developed by the human intention to produce discontinuity with regard to what precedes it. Origins and beginnings are therefore complementary forces in search of dominance. To the tendency of origins to centrally dominate the beginnings that derive from it, beginnings respond with the opposite tendency to deny origins and begin anew. In this context one can always speak of **new beginnings**, but never of **new origins**, as a beginning is exactly that which attempts to produce changes in origins, thus in a way denying them.

In responding to this dialectics of origins and beginnings, Machado has chosen to stress origins and to regard with suspicion all radical assertions of fresh beginnings. The Western Literary Tradition is for the Brazilian writer an origin which cannot be denied and which is opposed to local color. His role as a writer is to strike a balance between these two extremes so that neither the controlling power of origins nor the radical reversal of beginnings are allowed to dominate literary production. Such a balance may be achieved by means of the **appropriation** of previous

texts. By using appropriation as a basic strategy in writing, the writer in the colony succeeds in producing both the repetition of origins and novelty. It implies the ability to make one's own what is foreign and strange. What for Machado was the "instinct of nationality" was the result of the writer's adequate usage of appropriation. Guided by such an instinct, he would bring together both local color and universality. He would, in short, be both a man of his time and of his country.<sup>12</sup>

In order to be a man of his time Machado needed to have what Péricles Eugênio da Silva Ramos called his "international antenna" adjusted to absorb Western Culture.<sup>13</sup> That involved the early attempt to learn French (after 1855, when he probably moved from the suburbs to downtown Rio, and the later attempt to learn English, probably after his marriage in 1869. It involved also his experiences in translation: in 1870 he begins to publish a translation of Dickens's *Oliver Twist* and in 1880 he publishes the *Ocidentais*, which includes translations of parts of Dante's *Inferno*, of Shakespeare ("To be or not to be"), as well as the translation of "The Raven". But it would be misleading to believe that Machado was only translating foreign works in order to make them accessible to the Brazilian public. To do this would mean only to achieve part of his literary project, that is, to be a man of his time. He translates also in order to be a man of his own country, that is, he misreads, distorts and adapts foreign texts so that, by means of this act of appropriation, what is foreign becomes a part of an alternative context. It is such an act of appropriation that I think best explains the mistranslation of "The Raven" in the *Ocidentais*: Machado begins by altering the stanza form and the length of the lines. These alterations in terms of rhythm lead in turn to significant changes in meaning by means of additions, subtractions, and distortions of meaning. Nor are these changes irrelevant to the main thematic concerns of the *Ocidentais*. As Mário Curvello rightly observed in his study of Machado's poetry, the selection of foreign texts to be translated usually depends on the possibility the original may have of echoing the thematic trends of Machado's own poems. If this possibility exists, then the foreign fragment is appropriated by means of the techniques of "montage" and "incorporation":

*In "Uma Ode de Anacreonte" the process of appropriation of the foreign text implies the techniques of montage and, simultaneously, of incorporation (aproveitamento). Starting from a foreign text, he constructs another text as if the work of art were part of a universe shaped as a spiral and of a process of communication between art itself and its derived products.*<sup>14</sup>

In the case of the translation of "The Raven", Machado is at pains to minimize the significance of the individual drama of the lover and to replace it by emphasizing the raven as symbolic of loss, doubt and undying, painful remembrance of lover forever lost because these thematic concerns echo similar thematic concerns in other poems of the **Ocidentais**. As Mario Curvello points out, although there is no well-defined unity of subject-matter in the **Ocidentais**, there is a "cataclismic intonation" which constantly suggests the despairing view of human hopelessness and of the world described by the **Ecclesiastes** as the world of "nihil novi sub sole."<sup>15</sup>

If there is value in Machado's translation of Poe, it is not because it is a translation in the sense that Fernando Pessoa uses the word. Unlike Pessoa, Machado is the writer in the colony who was suffering from a peculiar kind of anxiety of influence and who was particularly aware of the implications of this anxiety for the construction of nationality in literature. For such a writer accurate translation would be of no use. Appropriation of foreign texts, on the other hand, would be extremely significant, as by means of appropriation the writer in the new world would find an answer to the radical contradiction between origins and beginnings. Evidently, the construction of nationality in literature depended on the proper response to this contradiction. For Machado this proper response was the strategy of appropriation and the rejection of mere translation.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> José Guilherme Merquior, *De Anchieta a Euclides* (Rio de Janeiro: José Olímpio, 1977), p.166.

<sup>2</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, *Poems*, ed. Thomas Olive Mabbot (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), pp.364-365. Further quotations from "The Raven" will be taken from this edition.

- <sup>3</sup> Fernando Pessoa, **Obra Poética** (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Aguilar, 1981), p.361.
- <sup>4</sup> Machado de Assis, "O Corvo", in Edgar Allan Poe, **Ficção Completa, Poesia & Ensaios**, trad. Oscar Mendes (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Aguilar, 1981), p.900. Further quotations from Machado's translation will be taken from this edition.
- <sup>5</sup> Fernando Pessoa, **Páginas de Estética e de Teoria e Crítica Literárias** (Lisboa: Edições Ática, 1973), pp.74-75.
- <sup>6</sup> Machado de Assis, **Poesias Completas** (Rio de Janeiro: W.M.Jackson, 1950), pp.359-360. See, for example, the first five lines of Machado's translation:
 

Ser ou não ser, eis a questão. Acaso  
 É mais nobre a cerviz curvar aos golpes  
 Da ultrajosa fortuna, ou já lutando  
 Extenso mar vencer de acerbos males?  
 Morrer, dormir, não mais...
- <sup>7</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition," in **Edgar Allan Poe: Poems and Essays**, Intro. by Andrew Lang (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1979), p.170-171.
- <sup>8</sup> "The Philosophy of Composition", p.177.
- <sup>9</sup> "The Philosophy of Composition", p.174.
- <sup>10</sup> Louis D. Rubin, Jr., "Edgar Allan Poe: A Study in Heroism", in **The Curious Death of the Novel and Other Essays** (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1967), p.56.
- <sup>11</sup> Mário Curvello, "Falsete à Poesia de Machado de Assis", in Alfredo Bosi et alii, **Machado de Assis** (São Paulo: Ática, 1982), p.484.
- <sup>12</sup> Machado de Assis, "Instinto de Nacionalidade", in Afrânio Coutinho, org., **Caminhos do Pensamento Crítico**, vol. I (Rio de Janeiro: Ed. Americana, 1974), p.345.
- <sup>13</sup> Péricles Eugênio da Silva Ramos, "Apresentação", in Péricles Eugênio da Silva Ramos, comp., **Machado de Assis - Poesia** (Rio de Janeiro, Agir, 1964), p.5.
- <sup>14</sup> "Falsete à Poesia de Machado de Assis", p.90.
- <sup>15</sup> "Falsete à Poesia de Machado de Assis", p.91.