

**Dialogues of The Doubt: Dostoevsky's *The Eternal Husband* and Machado de Assis's *Dom Casmurro* / *Diálogos da dúvida: O eterno marido, de Dostoiévski e Dom Casmurro, de Machado de Assis***

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**ABSTRACT**

This article establishes a dialogic analysis of Dostoevski's *The Eternal Husband* (1870) and Machado de Assis's *Dom Casmurro* (1899), focusing on the treatment of the doubt as an aesthetic category by both authors. This dialog opens room to questions related to the specificities of their prose in the context of Realism and to the signs of dialogism on the writing of the authors.

**KEYWORDS:** Dialogism; Realism; Bakhtin; Dostoevsky; Machado de Assis

**RESUMO**

*Este artigo estabelece uma análise dialógica dos romances O eterno marido (1870), de Dostoiévski, e Dom Casmurro (1899), de Machado de Assis, com foco no tratamento da dúvida como categoria estética pelos dois escritores. Nesse diálogo, abre-se espaço para questões relativas às especificidades da prosa machadiana e dostoiévskiana no contexto do realismo e às marcas do dialogismo na escritura dos dois autores.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Dialogismo; Realismo; Bakhtin; Dostoiévski; Machado de Assis

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Among Bakhtin's most fertile contributions for reflections on artistic language, his studies on Dostoevsky's poetics stand out due to the extension of the concepts that were formulated, in principle, to differentiate specific aspects of Dostoevsky's novelistic universe, such as dialogism, but started to be applied to the analysis of the most diverse literary discourses. In the case of Machado de Assis, whose writing style has more differences than similarities when compared to Dostoevsky, the concept of dialogism establishes some points of fruitful rapprochement between the two writers with regard to the peculiarities that make their work very far from the literary production of their historical and aesthetic time.

Machado de Assis and Dostoevsky are traditionally included in the list of realistic writers. Both composed much of their work during the second half of the nineteenth century and dialogued with the issues of a time when translating reality through the arts was the ideal to be pursued. However, in spite of some characteristic features of the realist school found in their work, Machado de Assis and Dostoevsky transgressed the boundaries of this movement, presenting unusual characteristics in their writing if compared to other authors of the time.

Both in Machado de Assis and in Dostoevsky, the reality that matters for the construction of the novel universe is not the one that one sees when looking at external facts, but the reality experienced by the consciousness of the characters.

The allure of Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis (1839-1908) consists, largely, in the impossibility to classify him easily in the styles of his time. His art resists rigid frameworks, being able, among other merits, to reveal profound contradictions of human nature and, simultaneously, to develop a real and critical picture of Rio de Janeiro's society of that time (D'AMBROSIO, 1994, p.110).<sup>1</sup>

By lingering over the contradictions of human nature, a supposedly universal and timeless object, while working on the elaboration of a realistic picture of the nineteenth-century society of Rio de Janeiro, a local, specific, and historically determinable element, Machado de Assis is appointed by Boris Schnaiderman as "one

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<sup>1</sup> Text in original: "O fascínio de Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis (1839-1908) consiste, em boa parte, na impossibilidade de classificá-lo facilmente em estilos de época. Sua arte resiste a enquadramentos rígidos, conseguindo, entre outros méritos, revelar profundas contradições da natureza humana e, simultaneamente, elaborar um quadro real e crítico da sociedade carioca de seu tempo."

of the writers that most feels the pulse of history” (2006, p 273).<sup>2</sup> In this sense, he compares Machado de Assis to Dostoevsky:

Leaving aside the episodic, the accessory, Machado in *The Alienist* dives into major themes of the human condition. At the same time, so different from Dostoevsky in terms of literary construction, he approaches him in his way of looking at the human psyche and the limitations imposed to it (2006, p.273).<sup>3</sup>

In Bakhtin’s view, at the creation of the image of the romanesque man the realistic novel must present a high degree of apprehension of the real historical time. From this point of view, Realism does not merely represent mimetically the historical reality and its influences on man, but rather portrays this man transforming himself along with the transformation of the world, absorbing the external facts as a substrate of his own image. At the same time, he puts his mark in this world also in formation.

Observing Machado de Assis’s and Dostoevsky’s writing from this perspective, we realize that for both authors the reality that matters for the construction of the novel universe is not the one that one sees when analyzing external facts, but the reality built and lived through language, the creative matter of man’s image in the artistic universe.

In the case of Machado de Assis, to whom the authorship of the first Brazilian realist novel, *The Posthumous Memoirs of Bras Cubas* (1997/1881),<sup>4</sup> is canonically credited, critics always tried to aggregate adjectives to his realism in an attempt to expand the scope of the movement so that it would cover the specificities of his writing. Gustavo Bernardo, in *O Problema do Realismo de Machado de Assis [The Problem of Realism in Machado de Assis]* (2011) gives several examples:

[...] The English critic John Gledson recognizes that there are “many critics who tell us that Machado is realistic,” with which he agrees, but he warns us that this realism “is especially deceptive.”

[...] The philosopher Patrick Pessoa, in an analysis of *The Posthumous Memoirs of Bras Cubas*, affirms that Machado de Assis’s style could be named “phenomenological realism, since the idea of a ‘reality in

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<sup>2</sup> Text in original: “um dos escritores em que mais se sente o pulsar da história.”

<sup>3</sup> Text in original: “Deixando de lado o episódico, o acessório, Machado em *O alienista* mergulha nos grandes temas da condição humana. E ao mesmo tempo, tão diferente de Dostoiévski em termos de construção literária, aproxima-se deste no modo de encarar a psique humana e as limitações que lhe são impostas.”

<sup>4</sup> ASSIS, J. M. M. de. *The Posthumous Memoirs of Bras Cubas*. Translated by Gregory Rabassa. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

itself,' which the writer should faithfully reproduce, like a court stenographer, is not conceived; on the contrary, it is assumed that any possible reality can only come to light, can only be shown within a certain perspective, a certain poetic understanding of being."

[...] Alfredo Bosi reinforces the notion that Machado de Assis's "realism of moral investigation" is also a "higher realism." He states that, "under the appearance of an agonal and fatalistic universal perspective, Machado was the most 'realistic' among the Brazilian narrators of his time: the one that boldly understood and explored the spirit of the new society and more clearly imprinted it in figures and exemplary plots" (2011, pp.37-43).<sup>5</sup>

Even Roberto Schwarz, one of the great defenders of Machado de Assis's critical stance on socio-political issues of the patriarchal-landowning society in Brazil in the nineteenth century, inverts the preconceived order, by which Machado de Assis's work chronologically evolved from Romanticism to Realism. He says that even before 1880 Machado de Assis produced what he calls a "well-thinking realism":

Machado de Assis's boldness began timid, limited to the scope of family life, in which he analyzed the perspectives and iniquities of Brazilian paternalism, supported in slavery and vexed by liberal ideas. Although not lacking respect, he called into question the unacceptable helplessness of dependents and their other extreme, that is, the arbitrariness of the owners, equally unacceptable, although under civilized cover. In relation to genre, it was a well-thinking realism for families. In relation to the subject matter, Machado de Assis focused on and scanned with insight a characteristic complexity of relations due to the reuse of the colonial inequities in the orbit of an independent nation, committed to freedom and progress.

Then, from 1880, the boldness becomes broad and spectacular, *defying the assumptions of realistic fiction*, that is, the nineteenth century scaffolding of bourgeois normality (SCHWARZ, 2012, p.248; emphasis in original).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Text in original: "(...) o crítico inglês John Gledson reconhece que se encontram "muitos críticos que nos dizem que Machado é realista", com o que ele concorda, mas alerta que esse realismo "é sobretudo enganoso". (...) O filósofo Patrick Pessoa, numa análise das *Memórias póstumas*, afirma que se poderia chamar o estilo machadiano de "realismo fenomenológico, já que não se concebe a ideia de uma 'realidade em si mesma' que o escritor deveria fielmente reproduzir, como se fosse um taquígrafo judiciário, mas se pressupõe que toda e qualquer realidade possível só pode vir à luz, só pode mostrar-se no âmbito de uma determinada perspectiva, de uma determinada compreensão poética do ser". (...) Alfredo Bosi reforça a noção de que o "realismo de sondagem moral" de Machado é também um "realismo superior", ao afirmar que, "sob as espécies de uma perspectiva universal agônica e fatalista, Machado foi o mais 'realista' dos narradores brasileiros do seu tempo; aquele que mais desassombadamente entendeu e explorou o espírito da nova sociedade e mais nitidamente o inscreveu em figuras e enredos exemplares."

<sup>6</sup> Text in original: "A ousadia machadiana começou tímida, limitada ao âmbito da vida familiar, onde analisava as perspectivas e iniquidades do paternalismo à brasileira, apoiado na escravidão e vexado por ideias liberais. Sem faltar ao respeito, colocava em exame o desvalimento inaceitável dos dependentes e o seu outro polo, as arbitrariedades dos proprietários, igualmente inaceitáveis, embora sob capa civilizada.

From the “well-thinking realism,” Machado de Assis’s work evolved, on Schwarz’s understanding, as it dared to defy “the assumptions of realistic fiction.” However, it did not fail to be based on realism, as Schwarz states on the next excerpt:

In the most conspicuous manner, Machado de Assis’s provocations recycled a classic and refined range of pre-realist resources in open disobedience to the nineteenth-century sense of reality and its objectivism. As stated by the author himself, he now adopted “the free form of a Sterne or a Xavier de Maistre,” referring to, above all, the digressive will of the European novel from the eighteenth-century. Nevertheless, and contrary to what could be supposed from the breaking of rules, the spirit was poignantly realistic, absorbed both in the implacable logic of the social and in the task to identify Brazilian traits. And it was also post-realistic, interested in showing the bad face of the verisimilitude of the bourgeois order, whose unconfessed or unconscious reverse was open to visitors, according to the modern and exposing positions of the end-of-century (2012, pp.249-250).<sup>7</sup>

According to the critics, deceptive, phenomenological realism, moral, higher, well-thinking investigation realism, the recycling of pre-realistic, post-realistic resources are just some of the variants of Machado de Assis’s realism, which configured a set of contradictions and relativizations of the movement that leads us to question the very concept of realism.

A similar situation appears when we turn to Dostoevsky’s criticism, or even to the own writer’s statement, who called himself “a realist in the higher sense” (BAKHTIN, 1999, p.92);<sup>8</sup> in other words, just as Machado de Assis, he did not see his

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Quanto ao gênero, tratava-se de um realismo bem pensante, destinado às famílias. Quanto à matéria, Machado fixava e esquadrihava com perspicácia um complexo de relações característico, devido ao reaproveitamento das desigualdades coloniais na órbita da nação independente, comprometida com a liberdade e o progresso. Em seguida, a partir de 1880, a ousadia se torna abrangente e espetacular, *desacatando os pressupostos da ficção realista*, ou seja, os andaimes oitocentistas da normalidade burguesa.”

<sup>7</sup> Text in original: “No mais conspícuo, as provocações machadianas reciclavam uma gama erudita e requintada de recursos pré-realistas, em desobediência aberta ao senso oitocentista da realidade e a seu objetivismo. Conforme o aviso do próprio Autor, ele agora adotava “a forma livre de um Sterne, ou de um Xavier de Maistre”, referindo-se, mais que tudo, ao arbítrio digressivo do romance europeu do século XVIII. Não obstante, e ao contrário do que fariam supor as quebras de regra, o espírito era incisivamente realista, compenetrado tanto na lógica implacável do social, como da tarefa de lhe captar a feição brasileira. E era também pós-realista, interessado em deixar mal a verossimilhança da ordem burguesa, cujo avesso inconfessado ou inconsciente abria à visitação, em sintonia com as posições modernas e desmascaradoras do fim-de-século.”

<sup>8</sup> BAKHTIN, M. M. *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*. Edited and translated by Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

work as fully integrated with realism, but rather envisioned the possibility of creating a greater realism, based on the understanding and on the expression of the interrelationship between human consciousness and history, which was not easily assimilated by the critics of the time.

Belinsky (1811-1848), one of the most respected Russian critics, enthusiastically received Dostoevsky's debut novel, *Poor People* (2013/1846),<sup>9</sup> for he saw in it a loyal and ruthless portrait of the hardships experienced by the representatives of the poorest segments of Russian society, a purpose aligned with realistic principles. However, he did not react so well to *The Double* (1997/1846),<sup>10</sup> published in the same year, for, according to the critic, in this second book, Dostoevsky abandoned reality to wander in the construction of daydreams and fantasies without social relevance.

In contemporary criticism, the tendency to adjectivize realism in order to define Dostoevsky's work remains. Fanger solves the problem of the impure realism of Dostoevsky's work by adopting the term "romantic realism":

"Romantic realism," in short, is not a paradox and can be made to seem one only by forgetting the historical relation between the terms – the fact that nineteenth-century realism evolved out of romanticism. The hybrid term thus indicates a particular stage of that evolution. But it would hardly be worth using if that were all it did: "early realism" might do as well. What I try to show in this book is that the work of four great writers – Balzac, Dickens, Gogol, and Dostoevsky – can be understood better in terms of this concept than of any other, that with its help we can see in them not "deviationists" from a familiar canon, but exemplars in their own right of a particular attitude toward the art of fiction, a broadly shared rationale and body of technique (1998, p.17).

Malcom Jones (2005) names it "fantastic realism":

What was important about his "fantastic realism" was not what can be defined in terms of the ideological debate or cultural climate of the time, but what can only be defined, if at all, in terms of a modernist (or even post-modernist) conception of art on the edge of the abyss (2005, p.10).

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<sup>9</sup> DOSTOEVSKY, F. M. *Poor People*. Translated by Hugh Aplin. New York: Alma Books, 2013.

<sup>10</sup> DOSTOEVSKY, F. M. *The Double*. Translated by Constance Garnett. New York: Dover, 1997.

Considering this context, in which the critics seem to add increasingly flexible and extensive spaces of inclusion into the boundaries of realism, in an attempt to make the realist aesthetics able to contain specificities – hardly classifiable in the molds of any literary school – of Dostoevsky’s and Machado de Assis’s writings, Bakhtin’s concept of dialogic discourse can bring to light some possibilities of reading the realistic sign in the artistic language of the two writers. They are anchored not on efforts to legitimate or contest the maintenance of their works in the realist canon, but on the analysis of dialogic relations as a construct for their particular forms of representation of reality.

As conceived by Bakhtin, the concept of dialogism covers a range of applications that goes beyond the boundaries of the literary universe and positions itself before human relations as a condition of interaction, of communication, of the full existence of an *I* that is only realized by the look of an *Other*.

In *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, published for the first time in 1929, Bakhtin establishes a dialogue with Dostoevsky’s heroes and with the (secondary) author to recreate the unconventional creative process developed by Dostoevsky: “In Dostoevsky’s novels, the author’s discourse about a character is organized as discourse about *someone actually present*, someone who hears him (the author) and is *capable of answering him*” (1999, p.63; emphasis in original).<sup>11</sup>

Whereas “the author’s discourse about a character is organized as discourse about *someone actually present*,” the dialogical discourse, created by Dostoevsky, is never closed; it does not conclude nor define. Rather, in the dialogical voice, the hero is represented as a living man who, by the very living condition (moving), only concludes himself with death.

Organizing the discourse about “someone who hears him (the author) and is capable of answering him,” the authorial voice assumes a dialogical position, facing the character as a *you*, not as a *he*. He remains in line of vision of the character, without adopting a position that is superior to, above, or outside the dialogue to be developed.

The concept of positioning is the starting point for the establishment of the dialogical relation between implied author, narrator and characters. For Bakhtin (1990,

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<sup>11</sup> For reference, see footnote 8.

p 21), the degree of autonomy in the relationship between diegesis figures is defined by the law of positioning, which determines the visual field of each other:

When I contemplate a whole human being who is situated outside and over against me, our concrete, actually experienced horizons do not coincide. For at each given moment, regardless of the position and the proximity to me of this other human being whom I am contemplating, I shall always see and know something that he, from his place outside and over against me, cannot see himself: parts of his body that are inaccessible to his own gaze (his head, his face and its expression), the world behind his back, and a whole series of objects and relations, which in any of our mutual relations are accessible to me but not to him. As we gaze at each other, two different worlds are reflected in the pupils of our eyes.<sup>12</sup>

Considering the positioning of each one in the text, author, narrator and characters occupy different places due to the difference of their points of view regarding the situations presented. Hence, another important concept of Bakhtin's dialogism is shown: the field of answerability. If each one occupies a different place and thus has a different view of the facts, their answerability is conditioned to that limited space that shows itself in a unique way to each one. Dialogic communication is only established due to the different points of view in tension in novelistic discourse.

Another important concept of dialogism is incompleteness. In the dialogic universe, the state of incompleteness is a prerequisite for the creation of interactive communication, of interrelation between independent and immiscible consciousnesses that populate the novel. Exactly because they are not finished, closed as reified characters, the discourses of the characters, the narrator, and the implied author are able to interfere with and be interfered by one another, making the word double-voiced and plurilingual.

In Machado de Assis's *Dom Casmurro* (2014/1899)<sup>13</sup> and Dostoevsky's *The Eternal Husband* (2008/1870),<sup>14</sup> the relationship built between the characters is a rich example of this dialogic intersection of consciousnesses that become mutual agents and reagents of interference, in which the double-voiced word finds fluency.

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<sup>12</sup> BAKHTIN, M. Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity. In: *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays* by M. M. Bakhtin. Edited by Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov. Translated by Vadim Liapunov. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1990, pp.4-256.

<sup>13</sup> ASSIS, J. M. M. de. *Dom Casmurro*. Translated by Helen Caldwell. London: Dount Books, 2014.

<sup>14</sup> DOSTOEVSKY, F. M. *The Eternal Husband*. Translated by Constance Garnett. New York: Dover, 2008.



José Dias is the aggregate of the Santiago family, and his discourse strongly influences Bento's discourse. Bento, the character-narrator of the novel, discovers his love for Capitu through the voice of the other:

All this was now presented to me through the mouth of José Dias, who had informed upon me to myself. [...] I loved Capitu! Capitu loved me! [...] This first pulsation of sap, this revelation of consciousness to itself – I have never forgotten it (ASSIS, 2014, p.45).<sup>15</sup>

Helen Caldwell, in her analysis of *Dom Casmurro, The Brazilian Othello of Machado de Assis: a study of Dom Casmurro* (1960),<sup>16</sup> describes the effect of the aggregate's words on the protagonist's consciousness: "José Dias not only implanted the seeds of love in Bento by his 'informing'; he also implanted the suspicion that Capitu would entrap and deceive him, with the remark about her 'gypsy eyes'" (p.6).

The suspicion is planted in Bento's consciousness by José Dias's voice, which, interacting with the boy's discourse, becomes part of it. This interaction is fundamental for the construction of the doubt, of the suspicion that interferes with the action of the characters and the narrative's development.

According to Paulo Bezerra (2005, p.5), in his study of dialogism in *Esau e Jacó*, "For Bakhtin, the dialogic process is a struggle between consciousnesses, between individuals, in which the word of the other opens a fissure in listener's consciousness, penetrates it, comes into interaction with it, and leaves its indelible mark on it."<sup>17</sup>

The fissures in Bento's consciousness, caused by the other's discourse about Capitu, allows José Dias not only to act as an aggregate to the Santiago family, but also as an aggregate to the protagonist's consciousness. After planting the suspicion, José Dias enroots jealousy deeply in Bento's mind, which will fructify as the assurance of adultery. In this sense, Caldwell says:

While Bento was in the seminary, [...] José Dias would visit him between times to bring news of the family and to report on progress in

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<sup>15</sup> For reference, see footnote 13.

<sup>16</sup> CALDWELL, H. *The Brazilian Othello of Machado de Assis: a study of Dom Casmurro*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1960.

<sup>17</sup> Text in original: "Para Bakhtin, o processo dialógico é uma luta entre consciências, entre indivíduos, na qual a palavra do outro abre uma fissura na consciência do ouvinte, penetra nela, entra em interação com ela e deixa aí sua marca indelével."

breaking down Dona Gloria's resolution. On one of these occasions, Bento asked after Capitu. José Dias replied that she was gay and carefree as usual, and added that she would probably "hook" one of the young nobles in the neighborhood and marry him. The thought that Capitu was happy while he was sad and lonesome, and that she was flirting with some handsome noble, turned Santiago's vague feeling of suspicion in definite jealousy.

The title of this chapter is "Uma ponta de Iago" ("A touch of Iago"); from this point on, Othello-Santiago takes over the role of Iago, and manipulates his own handkerchiefs to fan his own jealous passion (1960, p.6).<sup>18</sup>

At this point, the dialogical circle is complete, for doubt and suspicion become concrete. They are elements that traverse the narrative of *Dom Casmurro*.<sup>19</sup> It is the discourse of doubt that gives the characteristic tone of the whole novel, configuring a fundamental expressive resource for the creation of the discursive relations between narrator/reader, narrator/character, and character/character.

In Dostoevsky's *The Eternal Husband* (2008/1870),<sup>20</sup> doubt and suspense also remain throughout the novel, structuring the dialogic relation between the two main characters – the husband (Trusotsky) and the lover (Velchaninov).

The short novel, organized into 17 chapters, is centered on the relationship between the deceased Natalia Vassilievna's husband (Pavel Pavlovich Trusotsky) and the lover (Alieksiéi Ivanovich Velchaninov), men who meet each other again in St. Petersburg after nine years. From this encounter, many questions arise and remain throughout the development of the novel: who is Lisa's true father? [Lisa is Natalia Vassilievna's daughter; she was born eight months after the lover's departure from the city.] What does the husband actually know about the relationship between his wife and Velchaninov? What are Trusotsky's real intentions toward Velchaninov?

In Dostoevsky's writing, the doubt is a recurrent aesthetic-discursive feature, essential for the maintenance of the novelistic plot.

From the narrative title, Dostoevsky transfers his authorial voice, which would name his own creation, to the voice of his main character, Velchaninov. It is his the expression "eternal husband." With it Velchaninov pejoratively classifies Trusotsky, framing him in a closed and defined type:

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<sup>18</sup> For reference, see footnote 16.

<sup>19</sup> For reference, see footnote 14.

<sup>20</sup> For reference, see footnote 14.

To his mind, the essence of such a husband lay in his being, so to say, “the eternal husband,” or rather in being, all his life, a husband and nothing more. “Such a man is born and grows up only to be a husband, and, having married, is promptly transformed into a supplement of his wife, even when he happens to have unmistakable character of his own. The chief sign of such a husband is a certain decoration. He can no more escape wearing horns than the sun can help shining; he is not only unaware of the fact, but is bound by the laws of his nature to be unaware of it” (DOSTOEVSKY, 2008, pp.47-48).<sup>21</sup>

The discourse that defines a character as a closed type, a model, would be the antithesis of the dialogic creation, typical of Dostoevsky. Thus, we can conclude that in this polyphonic construction of the title *The Eternal Husband*, the author assumes the voice of a character to reveal the reifying look at the other, foreshadowing the tense relation that grows between these two consciousnesses throughout the novel.

In *Dom Casmurro*, the title puts in tension not only the voices of the author and a character, but configures an even more complex set of dialogical relations. When the secondary author, Bento Santiago, gives the title of his book the nickname that he received from a poet, as he reports in Chapter One, The Title, he appropriates the voice of this character, taking for himself the vision of the other about him. In addition to this dialogical relationship between the voices of the secondary author and narrator Bento and the voice of the poet, we should consider the presence of the author’s own voice, as the category of creator and conductor of the two voices in interaction: He begins to reveal Bento’s ambiguous character, who seeks, in the eye of the other, an image to define himself.

Absent from himself, without becoming the agent of his own history, the boy who hides behind the curtains when hearing his name portrays the man devoid of voice, the one who was to become in the present: Bento is Casmurro’s seed – one voiceless narrator.

A dialogical relationship is established and sustained through different consciousnesses/voices in tension. Attempting to establish a dialogue between *The Eternal Husband* and *Dom Casmurro*, the first point of tension lies between the

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<sup>21</sup> For reference, see footnote 14.

different types of narrator and thus of viewing angles under which discourse is developed in each novel.

*The Eternal Husband* is narrated in third person by a narrator who stands next to Velchaninov, taking a point of view that is very close to the consciousness of this character. Even considering the surplus of vision of this narrator, which includes the external and internal conformation of the character, and the unique positioning of each conscience in the text, we can say that, in relation to the other characters, the narrator practically sees what Velchaninov sees. He looks at the other characters from a point of view that is very close to Velchaninov's. His point of view is recognized by the narrator.

*Dom Casmurro* is narrated in first person by a narrator who appears not only as the protagonist of the story lived and narrated by him, but also as the author of the book itself. This position, unlike what happens in *The Eternal Husband*, puts the reader face to face with the narrator/character in a direct dialogue between him, the one who tells his own story, and the reader, who *hears* it.

Although different, both narrative strategies contribute to the construction of the doubt and to perpetuate it throughout the course of the two novels.

Without counting on the narrator's surplus of vision, the reader of *Dom Casmurro* sees the world only through Casmurro's eyes, depending on them to know the other characters and the narrative situations. In a first reading, this view, defined by Casmurro's eyes, leads the reader to doubt the honesty of the other characters – as Casmurro doubts them, condemns them, and absolves them according to the narrator/character's judgment. We can consider that the first doubts raised by the reading of *Dom Casmurro* are the narrator/character's very questions. This is confirmed by critical studies published before *The Brazilian Othello of Machado de Assis* by Helen Caldwell in 1960.<sup>22</sup> In such studies, the adultery was considered a fact.

Only when the reader enters into dialogue with the novel, in an active, questioning and responsive way, the doubt in *Dom Casmurro* reaches a whole new level: the object of doubt changes from Capitu to Bento Santiago. It is up to the reader to fill in the gaps through the impressions of his own surplus of vision, looking at the narrator/character Casmurro from the unique positioning of a reader who asks, answers,

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<sup>22</sup> For reference, see footnote 16.

and goes into a dialogic relationship with the voices of the text. Doubting Casmurro, in terms of what is seen through his eyes and narrated by his voice, the reader is able to see and dialogue with the other characters.

In *The Eternal Husband*, the reader already has the narrator's surplus of vision to know the main character, Velchaninov, an advantage that could supposedly reveal a more complete and impartial image of his external features, an image less committed to the sense of self-preservation than the one of a narrator who builds himself before others. However, the positioning of the narrator, closer to Velchaninov and to his view of the other characters, also favors a biased reading of the doubt: The reader is placed next to the narrator, seeing the other characters by Velchaninov's viewing angle, making Velchaninov's doubts in relation to others his own doubts.

In the dialogic presentation of Velchaninov's consciousness, in which the voices of the author, the narrator and the character are related, we can see the interference of a fourth voice, Trusotsky's. That voice appears in the first chapter of the book, in the passage in which the narrator describes the eyes of the character. It is when the dialogue of Velchaninov's and Trusotsky's consciousnesses starts:

Those eyes [...] had begun to betray the cynicism of a worn-out man of doubtful morals, a duplicity, an ever-increasing irony and another shade of feeling, which was new: a shade of sadness and of pain – a sort of absent-minded sadness as though about nothing in particular and yet acute (DOSTOEVSKY, 2008, p.9).<sup>23</sup>

According to Bakhtin (1999, p.40), “Dostoevsky could hear dialogic relationships everywhere, in all manifestations of conscious and intelligent human life; where consciousness began, there dialogue began for him as well.”<sup>24</sup> Thus, when guilt, pain and sadness “as though about nothing in particular” awaken in Velchaninov's consciousness, the dialogue with Trusotsky begins.

The narrator announces this unfamiliar presence through his own unfamiliarity to Velchaninov's abrupt appreciation of loneliness, introspection, suffering “for different causes – from unexpected causes which would have formerly been quite inconceivable, from causes of a ‘higher order’ than ever before” (DOSTOEVSKY,

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<sup>23</sup> For reference, see footnote 14.

<sup>24</sup> For reference, see footnote 8.

2008, p.10).<sup>25</sup> Here, even before Trusotsky is presented in the plot, or is shown as a recognized image to Velchaninov (and narrator), his values, completely different from Velchaninov's, are present there – the voice of the betrayed husband, long ago forgotten by his wife's lover, begins to echo in Velchaninov's consciousness, assuming a dialogical tension with the voice of the latter. The "higher order," laughable to the Velchaninov of other times, foreshadows the official arrival of the husband (which will occur only between chapters 2 and 3) and contributes to the emergence of the doubt, which acts as an aesthetic appeal, a tonal element that will be perpetuated throughout the narrative.

The doubt established in this particular passage relates to the reasons for the emergence of such "causes of a 'higher order,'" raised in Velchaninov's consciousness, and the motivation of the moral crisis lived by the character. These questions will be answered in chapter 2, when he realizes that the casual and intermittent encounters with the mysterious gentleman with "that cursed bowler hat with that beastly mourning crape [...] is the cause of it all" (DOSTOEVSKY, 2008, p.18).<sup>26</sup> Until this realization, the atmosphere of doubt remained as a result of the character's own lack of self-confidence. In the narrator's words, Velchaninov "had noticed for some time past that he had become excessively sensitive about everything, trifles as well as matters of importance, and so he made up his mind to trust his feelings as little as possible" (DOSTOEVSKY, 2008, p.11).<sup>27</sup>

Distrust in this case is not selective, it is not oriented only to others; it also functions as a feature of self-preservation to Velchaninov. By becoming suspicious, Velchaninov decides to "to trust his feelings as little as possible" (DOSTOEVSKY, 2008, p.11).<sup>28</sup> His consciousness is fragmented into two selves: the first self is observing and suspicious of himself, of his feelings, judgments and recent actions, influenced by the voice of the other – the husband; the second self thinks, judges, and acts without complete control of the character, without the moral (or immoral) standards that guided his actions in the past.

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<sup>25</sup> For reference, see footnote 14.

<sup>26</sup> For reference, see footnote 14.

<sup>27</sup> For reference, see footnote 14.

<sup>28</sup> For reference, see footnote 14.

But the point was that all that was recalled came back now with a quite fresh, surprising and, till then, inconceivable point of view, and seemed as though some one were leading up to it on purpose. Why did some things he remembered strike him now as positive crimes? And it was not a question of judgements of his mind only: he would have put little faith in his gloomy, solitary and sick mind; but it reached the point of curses and almost tears, of inward tears (DOSTOEVSKY, 2008, p.12).<sup>29</sup>

The crisis experienced by Velchaninov is structured through this disintegration of his conscience, which is no longer univocal (as it happens with the heroes of monologic novels), to become double-voiced, plurilingual, incorporated (or reconstituted) through dialogue.

In *Dom Casmurro*, the interference of strange voices in Bento's consciousness is explicit in Chapter 12:

Confused voices repeated the words of José Dias:  
'Always together ...'  
'Whispering in secret ...'  
'If they should start making love ...' (ASSIS, 2014, p.42).<sup>30</sup>

The “confused voices” that echo in Bento's mind are José Dias's voice, opening a fissure in his consciousness and becoming acquainted with his own ideas about himself and his feelings for Capitu. Bento, always absent from himself, does not question the aggregate's voice. He accepts it as truth, assuming that he really loved Capitu and that Capitu also loved him. He believes that this love already existed before José Dias's discourse, as the aggregate had only been a means to bring this feeling from the unconscious to the conscious level.

Bento takes for himself the “eternal truth” (ASSIS, 2014, p.42),<sup>31</sup> uncovered by José Dias's words, and views it as the “revelation of consciousness itself” (ASSIS, 2014, p.42).<sup>32</sup> In this passage, we can see how Bento allows the aggregate to function as part of his consciousness, through a dialogic process in which the voice of the other – the aggregate – is assimilated by the voice of the self – Bento /narrator.

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<sup>29</sup> For reference, see footnote 14.

<sup>30</sup> For reference, see footnote 13.

<sup>31</sup> For reference, see footnote 13.

<sup>32</sup> For reference, see footnote 13.

More than an aggregate to the Santiago family, José Dias conquers a role of far greater importance: the *aggregate* of Bento's *consciousness*. Thus, he has a manipulative power over him.

In Chapter 32, *Capitu's Curiosity*, the definition given by José Dias to Capitu's "gypsy's eyes, oblique and sly" (ASSIS, 2014, p.86)<sup>33</sup> opens a fissure in Bento's consciousness, prompting him to examine the girl's eyes closely in order "to see if they could be called that" (ASSIS, 2014, p.86).<sup>34</sup>

What he sees, at a first glance, does not seem anything extraordinary to him. However, after a few moments of contemplation, the metaphor of "eyes like the tide" and the poetic narration of the sensation caused by them are as (if not more) threatening as the definition given by José Dias. Approaching the two definitions for Capitu's eyes, José Dias's and Bento's definition, we can see the aggregate speech echoing in the narrator/character's voice:

The Paduas are not entirely bad. Capitu, in spite of those eyes that the devil gave her... Did you ever notice the eyes of hers? Gypsy's eyes, oblique and sly. Well, in spite of them she could pass, if it were not for her conceit and her smooth talk (Chapter 25, p.70).

[...]

I had remembered the definition that José Dias had given of them, 'gypsy's eyes, oblique and sly'. I did not know what 'oblique' was, but I knew 'sly', and I wanted to see if they could be called that. Capitu let me look at her, and examine them. She only asked what it was, and if I had never seen them before. I found nothing extraordinary in them; their colour and gentleness were my old friends. The length of my contemplation, I think, gave Capitu another idea of my intent: she imagined that it was a pretext to look closer, with my own long, unflickering eyes enmeshed in hers. And it is to this that I attribute the fact that they began to grow larger, larger and shadowy, and with an expression that...

Grammar of lovers, give me an exact and poetic comparison to describe those eyes of Capitu's. I can find no image – without breaking the dignity of my style – to convey what they were and what they did to me. Eyes like the tide? Yes, like the tide. That's what they were. They had some mysterious and force-giving fluid that drew everything up into them, like a wave that moves back from the shore when the undertow is heavy. In order not to be swept under, I grasped at other neighbouring parts, her ears, her arms, at her hair that was spread over her shoulders; but as soon as I sought the pupils of her eyes again, the wave that came from them kept growing, cavernous,

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<sup>33</sup> For reference, see footnote 13.

<sup>34</sup> For reference, see footnote 13.



dark, threatening to engulf me, to pull me, drag me into itself (ASSIS, 2014, pp.86-87).<sup>35</sup>

The “eyes like the tide” are, in Bento’s discourse, the same “gipsy eyes, oblique and sly” of Jose Dias’s voice. From the point of view of the threat they posed, this image is already established in the character/narrator’s mind. Seeking evidence through direct observation, he assumed the magical dangers to which he would be exposed. Bento’s sensory experience (feeling dragged by the tide) is the way in which José Dias’s word, crystallized in his consciousness, emerges as discourse.

According to Bakhtin (2004, p.106; emphasis in original), “[t]he event of the life of the text, that is, its true essence, always develops *on the boundary between two consciousnesses, two subjects.*”<sup>36</sup> It is precisely on the boundary of Bento’s and José Dias’s consciousnesses, on the dialogical threshold of these two voices, that the universe of doubt, suspicion and jealousy, which drives the narrative in *Dom Casmurro*, is built.

A common thread between the two characters – Bento and Velchaninov – that characterizes the way the voice of others – José Dias and Trusotsky – enters their consciousnesses, is the apparent insignificance given by them to the latter, simply seen as the “aggregate” and the “eternal husband.” In both novels, the characters Bento and Velchaninov relate with José Dias and Trusotsky as objectified consciousnesses, defined either by their social status, as in the case of Bento (the landowner) and José Dias (the servant), or by their male images, as in the case of Velchaninov (seductive/lover/male) and Trusotsky (the eternal husband/betrayed/ weak).

This apparent insignificance of José Dias and Trusotsky, from Bento’s and Velchaninov’s point of view, influences the discursive relations between the characters. The underestimated discourses of the “aggregate” and “the eternal husband” do not inspire respect or danger; thus, they do not face great resistance to Bento’s and Velchaninov’s consciousnesses and are not bound to the reified images that the latter created about them. Not seen as inconclusive and free subjects, but as defined and

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<sup>35</sup> For reference, see footnote 13.

<sup>36</sup> BAKHTIN, M. The Problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology, and the Human Sciences: An Experiment in Philosophical Analysis. In: *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Translated by Vern W. McGee. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2004.

limited objects, José Dias and Trusotsky stealthily infiltrate their discourses in Bento's and Velchaninov's consciousnesses.

However, in the case of *The Eternal Husband*, the influence of Trusotsky on Velchaninov's consciousness is not supported nor limited by the apparent subservient relationship which occurs between José Dias and Bento. In the course of the dialogical relations, Trusotsky's speech is strengthened before Velchaninov, as the husband's level of awareness about Velchaninov's relationship with Natalia Vassilevna is still a mystery.

Unlike José Dias, who gains power to intervene in Bento's mind and in Santiago's whole family through a seemingly harmless discourse that flatters and never conflicts, Trusotsky's discourse remains in constant tension with Velchaninov's, in a play of hide and reveal, in which the roles in the dialogue alternate and confuse each other at each moment.

In this dialogue between *The Eternal Husband* and *Dom Casmurro*, in which there are more differences than similarities, considering the cultural contexts in which the works were created, we can see that both authors work the doubt as an aesthetic category – as Bakhtin had already stated about Dostoevsky. It is not limited to raise questions in order to be answered in the plot, but rather to draw the doubt in the fabric of the text, at all levels of discourse.

The characters, the agents of narrative, are not the only ones who live the doubt. The doubt, as an aesthetic feature, becomes the lens by which the senses are interpreted and recreated, both in reading – relationship between the voice/consciousness of the reader-*self* with the voices/consciousnesses of the text/*other* - and in the relationships between the characters, between self-consciousnesses, voices in interaction.

It can be said that, in *The Eternal Husband*, doubt inhabits the boundaries between consciousnesses in interaction, of the husband and the lover; in *Dom Casmurro*, doubt is a constituent element of Bento's consciousness. He will become Casmurro, assimilated by José Dias's voice. In both narratives, the representation of reality, whether related to the exterior or the interior of the characters, takes shape in the dialogic-discursive relationship of various voices in tension in the novelistic fabric.

Tzvetan Todorov, in the preface to Bakhtin's *Estética da criação verbal* [Aesthetics of Verbal Creation] (1984, xxxii), says that "Sense is freedom and

interpretation, its exercise: that really seems to be Bakhtin's last precept."<sup>37</sup> Bearing in mind Bakhtin's invitation to freedom, this article does not claim to reach closed conclusions; on the contrary, it proposes dialogues between the works of Machado de Assis and Dostoevsky, authors who are deeply dialogical in their creative process, the masters of a writing rich of senses that are open to multiple readings and that insinuate meanings in constant transformation.

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<sup>37</sup> Text in original: "O sentido é liberdade e a interpretação é o seu exercício: este parece realmente ser o último preceito de Bakhtin."

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Translated by the article's author

*Received March 10, 2015*

*Accepted August 30, 2015*