Discussion Questions (09/18)

Discussion Questions on Machado de Assis: (submitted by Abi)

1. What is the effect of the narrator’s direct addresses to the reader/critic? The effect of his discussions of the future structure of the novel (chapter length/placement)? The repeated allusions and appropriations of well-known literary, religious, and philosophical writings? (look at page 22, 49, 112, 153, or 176)

2. What do these techniques do when thinking about reality as representation?

3. How are the narrator’s reforms of his conscience, which are often spurred by situation of social or moral destitution, meaningful? (page 47 “The Muleteer”, page 116 “Manure”)

4. Why would “Humanitism” – the philosophy of an insane man who had fallen down the social ladder and is embraced by Cubas – particularly significant for Brazilian culture in the late 19th century? Or is it singularly meaningless?

Discussion Questions on Schwarz, chs 5, 6, 7: (submitted by Emily)

1. What does it mean when Schwarz says that the book, and especially the character of Dona Plácida, presents us with a “radically ideologized notion of effort, which is stripped of its intrinsic merit” (97)? How do the respective personal efforts of characters like Dona Plácida and Brás Cubas fit into 19th century Brazilian society? How does the narrative form express this lack of value of merit?

2. Ultimately, what is the value of the lives of characters such as Dona Plácida, Virgília’s husband, and Brás Cubas?

3. Could an author who had been born into the Brazilian ruling class—and stayed their his or her entire life—have written this book? What affect does social position have on one’s ability to represent life?

4. What affect does our own conception of the author’s life have on our understanding of his book and/or its importance as a cultural artifact?

Discussion Questions on Schwarz, Master: (submitted by Pablo)

1. Schwarz points out the Machado’s attempts at verisimilitude and the many things that his writings reflect about Brazil from the 19th Century, however do Machado's writings continue to have relevance when discussing Brazilian society today? Our society today?

2. How would a "living" memoir of Bras Cubas differ from his posthumous memoir, would he have reached that same conclusion about his life being a success because he bore no children?
3. Did Machado need to write the first four novels in his beginning phase to reach a point where he could write *Memoirs*?

4. Schwarz argues that the viewpoint in Machado's writing, especially in the first phase "is a civilizing [viewpoint], for it tries to make these relationships less barbaric for the dependents, and less sterile for the wealthy, all by means of an enlightened understanding of the interest of the two parties, each of whom is confused by the effects of arbitrariness, which is the real thing to be correct." How does the viewpoint in *Memoirs* fit within this statement? Does it fit into the same pattern? Where does it deviate?