

In 1839, Machado de Assis was born as a black child to free parents - and for 49 years, lived through the somber reality of legal slavery in Brazil. Yet, against all life's odds, he became arguably the most brilliant Brazilian writer of all time. He was a resilient and self-directed man who took every opportunity and is now one of my biggest inspirations. Through his life and work, he inspired me to value greatness, seek knowledge, and learn everywhere, every day, from the mundane. If I could go back in time for one day, then, it would be Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on September 29, 1908 - the date and place of Machado's funeral.

In Cemitério São João Batista, there would be grief, questioning, and crying – I must confess I would not contain my tears –, but all the hearts would be filled with the joy of having one day lived with Machado. From teachers to admirers, the people there present would be the ones who, all together, witnessed his life journey. By grabbing and arranging fragments of stories told by each one of them, I would get a unique perspective of Machado's life. No better day, then, to do that than when that urge to value one's legacy and tell their story reaches its peak in the human soul.

The stories would add up to an amazing narrative that explains what led that little child who had nothing to later become such an important personality. Because I am such a vivid admirer of Machado, and because he personally influenced me to write my own stories, I would very much like to use that experience to write a new biography of his. I want to offer the world, through a condensed and new perspective, the same he offered me: a chance to change through stories, and this time, stories centered around him. After the ceremony, then, I would spend my day hearing what people had to say. As I believe each person we share life with gets to know a different version of us, that is what I'd be interested in: the many versions of Machado that came together to build his complex, vibrant persona. My book would help its readers to take on the small actions that helped Machado forge and live his unusual life.

The first person I'd like to interview would be someone who would take the ferry with him as a child. Records have it that little Machado, on his daily journey to the city - where he worked with his parents selling candies on the streets -, would spend the entire trip with an open book in his hands. In my vision, this was the start of his path to knowledge. Which books did he read? Would he skip pages to ease the anxiety of knowing the ending? Would he

verbally react? Would he sometimes get bored and come up with better endings for a book? Would he bring those words into reality and see the ferry as a pirate ship, telling everyone there about treasures in islands and epic fights? I would like to understand how he used those books not only as a repertoire for the stories he wrote but also as life lessons. I want to know what values he took from those books, in order to better understand what essentially we can also seek to capture through fictional stories and characters, distinct cultures, foreign languages... With this, I would be able to write about how books are a door to the world of knowledge, curiosity, and imagination, and describe this through a perspective of a person who watched Machado as a kid and perceived what set him apart.

From his first classmates, girls from a girls-only school (in which the nuns would kindly allow him to watch some classes), I would ask about his thirst for knowledge. Was he shy or talkative? What were his favorite subjects? Was he the student that would ask questions non-stop? I would like to dedicate a chapter of my book to this moment of his life as it would reflect habits coming from an incomparable eagerness to learn, fueled by excitement about subjects of interest. With this, my book would help young readers find academic dreams of their own, and mirror some of Machado's early practices which boosted his development.

Lastly, I would talk to one of the former coworkers at Machado's first job in typography. He was young and suffered from epilepsy, which must have posed a great challenge; still, he persevered. I admire his strength and how he wasn't ashamed of his condition, even in such a time period. More than getting to know who Machado was in a work setting, I would try to understand what motivated and helped him to just keep on going. I would ask how he dealt with the disease in terms of his job performance, and what were the impressions of those who watched him battle this difficulty amongst all others we know. With this, I would want to give readers some insight, from Machado's experience, on how to deal with life disturbances and not give up, trusting themselves and giving their best, because we truly never know what awaits us ahead.

The final chapter of my book would be dedicated to blank pages, where my readers would be able to write a short story. I would invite them to imagine their new futures, using whatever learnings they took from Machado's path on Earth. I would like them, after reading the book, to see the world somewhat as Machado did, making the best out of their limited time here, seeking their truest passions, and never settling for mediocrity.