

CLAS Open Seminars - Lent Term 2026

SG1 Ground Floor, Alison Richard Building, 7 West Road, CB3 9DP

Monday 16 February - 5:15pm

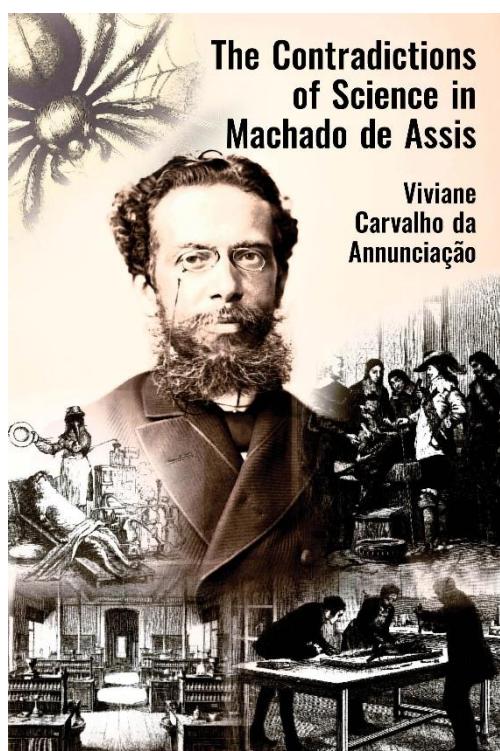
Book Launch: [The contradictions of science in Machado de Assis](#)

[Viviane Carvalho Da Annunciacao](#) (University of Cambridge)

Abstract: This talk explores the role of science in the short stories of Machado de Assis, focusing on works such as 'O Alienista' (1882), 'A Sereníssima República' (1882), and 'Idéias de Canário' (1899). It examines how Machado uses scientific theories as literary and sociological devices to critique modern state institutions. It shows how skepticism extends to the liberal and politically independent scientific discourse of late nineteenth-century Brazil.

By questioning the idealised figure of the rational scientist, Machado exposes the racial and economic hierarchies upheld by the dominant intelligentsia. Madness, egocentrism and the use of fantastic elements engage with the ancient tradition of the fable to highlight social tensions. The result is an ethically charged poetics of unreason, shaped by an ironic skepticism toward Romantic nationalism, literary naturalism, and scientific positivism, particularly in relation to race, gender, class, and nationality.

The discussion ultimately reassesses Machado de Assis as a radical thinker whose fiction offers a penetrating critique of race, gender and class in the making of modern Brazil. It encourages interdisciplinary interpretations of his work, opening new perspectives on his engagement with science and politics.



Viviane Carvalho Da Annunciacao is a Brazilian academic specialising in nineteenth-century Brazilian literature, particularly Machado de Assis, and the intersection of literature and science. Her work critiques Brazilian state institutions through contemporary scientific theories. She teaches Portuguese and literature at the University of Cambridge and has lectured at Oxford and Manchester. She also teaches English to Afro-Indigenous Brazilian doctoral students through the Transnational Anti-Racism in Education Programme at the Faculty of Education in Cambridge. Her research spans Lusophone literature, Indigenous thought and poetry, including Concrete poetry and Northern Irish literary responses to Belfast's divided architecture.