

THE DIAPHANOUS VEIL OF SATIRE: EÇA'S MESSAGE TO MACHADO IN *THE CITY AND THE MOUNTAINS*

O MANTO DIÁFANO DA SÁTIRA: A MENSAGEM DE EÇA PARA MACHADO N'A *CIDADE E AS SERRAS*

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In the novel *The City and the Mountains* (*A cidade e as serras*, 1900), Eça de Queirós parodied scientific theories and philosophical ideas of his time through the character Jacinto de Tormes. Nicknamed “o Príncipe da Grã-Ventura”, Jacinto is as equally dissatisfied by the ennui of his sumptuous life in Paris as he is by the wholesome rusticity of the mountains of Portugal to which he returns. Whether pessimistic, melancholic, or exuberant, Jacinto is subject to uncontrollable and rapidly concocted theories that guide and direct his conduct and ideas. While Eça and Machado both referenced the world of ideas of their day and reflected them in their characters, specific references in Eça’s depiction of Jacinto suggest that the author was looking over his shoulder at Machado de Assis. Eça pointedly revisits Machado’s own comic themes with plays on the two novels that he knew well, the *Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas* (*Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas*, 1880) and *Quincas Borba* (1886).

The rivalry between the two celebrated authors was complex, as indicated by Machado’s pithy dedication in Eça’s copy of *Quincas Borba*: “A Eça de Queirós. Machado de Assis”. Machado had read Eça in *As farpas* as early as February 1872 in a satire of the Brazilian emperor’s visit to Portugal, as well as of the use of language and types

of Brazilians in general. Machado had also read the first two versions of the novel *The Crime of Father Amaro* (*O crime do Padre Amaro*), published in 1875 in the *Revista Ocidental* (15 Feb. to 15 May), then significantly amplified in book form in 1876. He included a critique of the novel in his sharply critical review of *Cousin Basílio* (*O primo Basílio*, 1878) that he published in *O Cruzeiro* on 16 April, 1878, a scant two months after the publication of the novel in Portugal.

Within a broad rejection of the school of literary realism, Machado dismisses *O crime do Padre Amaro* as an imitation of Zola's novel *La faute de l'Abbé Mouret* (1875) alleging an analogous situation, identical style, and even the same title. What the critic finds to be improbable is that the terror felt by Amaro after a prolonged illicit sexual relationship with Amélia is sufficient to motivate him to plot the death of their son. The threat of scandal, so argues Machado, cannot equal Amaro's feelings of paternity. The critic laments the reduction of Amaro to a character operating in a servile and mechanistic dramatization without depth or attenuation. In the case of *O primo Basílio*, Machado finds the main character Luísa to be more a puppet than a "pessoa moral" (Assis, 2008a: 910). Her affair with the rapacious cousin returned from Brazil at a time her husband Jorge was away would have ended with a return to domestic normalcy. Basílio is anxious to be off to Paris anyway and tires of Luísa, and at her husband's return she feels a sensation of desire sweeping over her. The episode with Basílio would have been no more than an erotic interruption, the critic argues, were it not for the maid Juliana who discovers four compromising letters. With the pursuing blackmail, Juliana reduces Luísa to a state of fear and servitude that the critic finds unrepresentative of her nature and situation. Both in *O crime* and *O primo* Machado finds the conflicts to be incongruous, explained by Eça's dependence on the inflexible rules of the realist school. The application of sensuality and concubinage

for its own sake, he finds, produces repugnant scenes that bring to mind the salacious drawings in a theater corridor (Assis, 2008a: 908). Machado's final blow against Eça the realist, notwithstanding an expression of admiration for his talents, is to find his gift of observation to be excessively "complacente em demasia; sobretudo, é exterior, é superficial" (Assis, 2008a: 913).

In a letter from Newcastle dated June 29 of that year, Eça sent an elegant personal reply to Machado's devastating critique of "a catástrofe:" "(...) esse artigo todavia pela sua elevação e pelo talento com que está feito honra o meu livro, quase lhe aumenta a autoridade" (Queirós, 2008: 202). In the greatly augmented second edition of *O crime do Padre Amaro* (1880), Eça defended himself in more detail against the accusation that he copied Zola, without mentioning Machado by name in a note to the second edition:

Com conhecimento dos dois livros, só uma obtusidade córnea ou uma má fé cínica poderia assemelhar esta bela alegoria idílica, a que está misturado o patético drama de uma alma mística, a *O crime do padre Amaro* que, como podem ver neste novo trabalho, é apenas, no fundo, uma intriga de clérigos e de beatas tramada e murmurada à sombra de uma velha Sé de província portuguesa. (Queirós, 1880: 8)

While Eça may have rewritten parts of *O crime* for the second book edition in 1880 to attend to certain points of Machado's complaints, as suggested by scholar Campos Matos, without necessarily becoming his disciple, as Machado da Rosa implied, it may equally be the case that Machado was profoundly affected by his own criticism of imitation, since when he wrote the review he had not yet adopted the style of selective borrowing and adaptation of world texts that would characterize his novels over the next twenty years. Following the exchange with Eça, Machado would soon formu-

late a sophisticated concept of imitation, leading to his practice of adaptation, rewriting, distortion and appropriation of not one but a library of texts. Critic João César de Castro Rocha confirms that the “Machadinho” who wrote the critical review of Eça was not the same Machado as the author of the *Posthumous Memoirs* of 1880, and the most significant change is to be found in the play between texts and their literary antecedents, the arts of *imitatio* and *aemulatio*, a practice that became Machado’s most significant literary characteristic and the main productive force of his later fiction (2015: 57). One may well think that Machado’s reaction to his own review, his adoption of a fictional style through appropriation from a world library of texts, and his own courteous reply to Eça two years later, was the publication of the *Posthumous Memoirs*.

Machado also read Eça in Rio’s *Gazeta de Notícias*, where the Portuguese writer had published since July 24, 1880, including letters and chronicles from Paris and London, the novel *The Relic* (*A relíquia*, 1887), the last chapter of *The Maias* (*Os Maias*, 1888) and some writings of Fradique Mendes. On January 18, 1892, Eça was named director of its short-lived *Suplemento Literário*, for which he wrote five articles that year and on October 23 the short story “Civilização”, considered to be the basis for *The City and the Mountains*. From Paris, in planning possible contributors to the *Revista de Portugal*, Eça listed Machado de Assis’s name, following it by a question mark; indeed Machado never contributed to the journal. In 1898 Eça was named corresponding member (“sócio correspondente”) of Machado’s newly formed Academia Brasileira de Letras in Cadeira 2, whose patron was António José da Silva, “The Jew” (1705-1739). The Brazilian diplomat Domício da Gama, who met Eça in England in 1888, witnessed him perform the delirium chapter from *Brás Cubas* as after-dinner entertainment for his guests in Paris (Lyra, 1965: 199-200). Thus, the two writers were very well aware

of each other's texts and reputations, yet not beyond veiled satires of each other's works. Critic Agripino Grieco noted that Machado had no competitors in Brazil during his most productive years, and in that sense Eça became his closest point of reference and comparison after the counterpoint established by his 1878 critique. Machado may have thought to take advantage of Eça's literary success by calling attention to his polemical critique. On Eça's death in 1900, Machado wrote an expressive letter to Henrique Chaves on August 24: "Que hei de dizer que valha esta calamidade? Para os romancistas é como se perdêssemos o melhor da família, o mais esbelto, o mais válido. E tal família não se compõe só dos que entraram com ele na vida do espírito, mas também das relíquias da outra geração, e, finalmente, da flor da nova. Tal que começou pela estranheza e acabou pela admiração" (Assis, 2008a: 953).

In *The City and the Mountains*, Eça targeted themes in Machado's two novels for ridicule, focusing on Brás Cubas's delirium that had so delighted him and on Quincas Borba's philosophy of *Humanitismo* or *Humanitas*. In the *Posthumous Memoirs*, Machado addresses the topic of Nature's indifference, as dramatized in Schopenhauer's pessimistic philosophy. In contemplating the centuries passing below him in a flight back in time, Brás is bored, miserable and distracted by their monotony. The enduring achievement of his existence is to be the invention of a plaster that will allow humanity to overcome its state of melancholy. In *The City and the Mountains*, Jacinto plays the role of a Brás Cubas overcome with the tedium of life:

Desde essa manhã, Jacinto começou a mostrar claramente, escancaradamente, ao seu Zé Fernandes, o tédio de que a existência o saturava. O seu cuidado realmente e o seu esforço consistiram então em sondar e formular esse tédio—na esperança de o vencer logo que lhe conhecesse bem a origem e a potência. E o meu pobre Jacinto reproduziu a comédia

pouco divertida de um Melancólico que perpetuamente raciocina a sua Melancolia! (Queirós, 1965: 103)

While Machado's mad philosopher, Quincas Borba, explains the contractive phase of *Humanitas* to the uncomprehending Rubião, which includes the absorption of all things, Jacinto indulges in his own reductive philosophy, which is the destruction of civilization as a refined pleasure, as a distraction from the tedium of sipping his Chateau d'Yquem:

[Jacinto] declarou que hoje a única emoção, verdadeiramente fina, seria aniquilar a Civilização. Nem a ciência, nem as artes, nem o dinheiro, nem o amor, podiam já dar um gosto intenso e real às nossas almas saciadas. Todo o prazer que se extraía de *criar* estava esgotado. Só restava, agora, o divino prazer de *destruir!* (...) Desenrolou ainda outras *enormidades*, com um riso claro nos olhos claros. (Queirós, 1965: 65)

When Quincas Borba was faced with naming his great philosophical system, he thought first of its inventor: “Minha primeira ideia revelava uma grande enfatuação; era chamar-lhe borbismo, de Borba; denominação vaidosa, além de rude e molesta. E com certeza exprimia menos” (Assis, 2008b: 715). Jacinto faced a comparable presumption when engaged in his philosophical system:

Foi então que o meu Príncipe começou a ler apaixonadamente, desde o “Ecclesiastes” até Schopenhauer, todos os líricos e todos os teóricos do Pessimismo. Nestas leituras encontrava a reconfortante comprovação de que o seu mal não era mesquinamente “jacíntico”—mas grandiosamente resultante de uma Lei Universal. (Queirós, 1965: 104)

Philosopher Benedito Nunes identified among Machado's philosophical sources a disconsolate, tragic vision and a Schopenhauerian pessimism (1989: 17). The phrases *vanitas vanitatum* and *omnia vanitas*, repeated by Machado in his stories and novels, were traced by historian Sílvio Romero to "the four evangelists of pessimism", E. von Hartmann, Byron, Schopenhauer, and Leopardi—the latter who furnished the source text for Brás's delirium (Romero, 1897: 316). Eça seems to have shaped Jacinto into an amateur follower of *Humanitas*:

Não se separava então do "Ecclesiastes". E circulava por Paris trazendo dentro do coupé Salomão, como irmão de dor, com quem repetia o grito desolado que é a suma da verdade humana—*Vanitas Vanitatum!* Tudo é vaidade! Outras vezes, logo de manhã o encontrava estendido no sofá, num roupão de seda, absorvendo Schopenhauer—enquanto o pedicuro, ajoelhado sobre o tapete, lhe polia com respeito e perícia as unhas dos pés. (Queirós, 1965: 105)

Quincas exults in the direct method of discovery of his grand philosophy: "Venha para o Humanitismo; ele é (...) o mar eterno em que mergulhei para arrancar de lá a verdade. Os gregos faziam-na sair de um poço. Que concepção mesquinha! Um poço! (...) Eu fui diretamente ao mar" (Assis, 2008b: 727). Jacinto discovered his esoteric truths by passing directly through doors:

Sabes as experiências de Tyndall, com as chamas sensitivas... O pobre químico, para demonstrar as vibrações do som, tocou quase às portas da verdade esotérica. Mas quê! Homem de ciência, portanto homem de estupidez, ficou aquém; entre as suas placas e as suas retortas! Nós fomos além. Verificámos as ondulações da Vontade! (Queirós, 1965: 94)

Augmenting the satire of both authors, out of the philosophy of pessimism came great enjoyment for both Quincas and Jacinto: While gnawing on a chicken wing, Quincas observes with philosophical satisfaction that the nourishment, growth, and struggle of this African hen had been prepared by *Humanitas* “with the sole aim of satisfying my appetite”. Jacinto’s single-minded devotion to boredom and pessimism likewise yielded great personal benefits: “Possuía uma Fé – o Pessimismo: era um apóstolo rico e esforçado: tudo tentava, com sumptuosidade, para provar a verdade da sua Fé! Muito gozou nesse ano o meu desgraçado Príncipe!” (Queirós, 1965: 106).

When Jacinto comes to his senses, he delivers Eça’s final retort to Machado’s *Humanitas*:

– Oh! Que engenhosa besta, esse Schopenhauer! E maior besta eu, que o sorvia, e que me desolava com sinceridade! E todavia,—continuava ele, remexendo a chávena—o Pessimismo é uma teoria bem consoladora para os que sofrem, porque desindividualiza o sofrimento, alarga-o até o tornar uma lei universal, a lei própria da Vida; portanto lhe tira o carácter pungente de uma injustiça especial cometida contra o sofredor por um Destino inimigo e faccioso! (Queirós, 1965: 163)

As if to justify this universal law and defend the impartiality of destiny, Quincas had explained to Rubião why his grandmother had to die under the wheels of a carriage: “Se em vez de minha avó, fosse um rato ou um cão, é certo que minha avó não morreria, mas o fato era o mesmo; *Humanitas* precisa comer” (Assis, 2008b: 765).

Eça and Machado cited each other’s novels through even more subtle forms of satire. Brás Cubas almost loses Virgília because of Count B.V. of the legation of Dalmatia, who was recalled luckily by a revolution before Brás had himself been overthrown. Eça revives

Dalmatia in the form of a fish that likewise creates confusion when it becomes stuck in the dumbwaiter: "...reparando que em torno, subitamente, todo o serviço estacara como no conto do Palácio Petrificado. E o prato agora devido era o peixe famoso da Dalmácia, o peixe de Sua Alteza, o peixe inspirador da festa! Jacinto, nervoso, esmagava entre os dedos uma flor. E todos os escudeiros sumidos!" (Queirós, 1965: 65).

On the topic of worms, Brás Cubas dedicates his memoirs to one that devoured his cadaver, his Spanish mistress Marcela is gnawed by another, and other worms consume his final theory of editions: "Cada estação da vida é uma edição, que corrige a anterior, e que será corrigida também, até a edição definitiva, que o editor dá de graça aos vermes" (Assis, 2008b: 662). Machado's reference is to Charles Darwin's *Worms* (1881), based on the geologist Charles Lyell's research on the geological benefit of worms, revealing that turf will be smoothed out by passing every few years through the bodies of worms. In Eça's novel, an old priest wags a fat finger and invokes the beneficent action of Lyell's and Machado's worms:

E por fim, quem muito se demora no mundo, como que, termina por se convencer que no mundo não há coisa ou ser inútil. Ainda ontem eu lia num jornal do Porto, que por fim, segundo se descobriu, são as minhocas que estrumam e lavram a terra, antes de chegar o lavrador e os bois com o arado. Até as minhocas são úteis. Não há nada inútil... (Queirós, 1965: 169)

Perhaps as homage to Eça, and to continue the practice of posthumous citation, in the novel *Esau and Jacob* (1904) Machado borrows a scene from Eça's short story "José Matias" (1897), who, in the apotheosis of his obsession with Elisa, waits throughout the nights in a doorway on the street across from her balcony:

E acreditará o meu amigo que então, todas as noites, ou por trás da vidraça ou encostada à varanda (com o apontador dentro, estirado no sofá, já de chinelas, lendo o *Jornal da Noite*), ela se demorava a fitar o portal, muito quieta, sem outro gesto, naquele antigo e mudo olhar do terraço por sobre as rosas e as dalias? O José Matias percebera, deslumbrado. E agora avivava desesperadamente o lume, como um farol, para guiar no escuridão os amados olhos dela, e lhe mostrar que ali estava, transido, todo seu, e fiel! (Queirós, 1993: 29)

Machado recasts the situation in telling of the clerk Gouveia's attempted courtship of Flora in Chapter XCV:

[Flora] abriu uma das janelas do quarto, que dava para a rua, encostou-se à grade e enfiou os olhos para baixo e para cima. Viu a noite sem estrelas, pouca gente que passava, calada ou conversando, algumas salas abertas, com luzes, uma com piano. Não viu certa figura de homem na calçada oposta, parada, olhando para a casa de Batista. Nem a viu, nem lhe importaria saber quem fosse. A figura é que tão depressa a viu como estremeceu e não despegou mais os olhos dela, nem os pés do chão (...). [Flora] nem deu agora pelo vulto (...). Acrescento que começou a pingar fino e a ventar fresco. Gouveia trazia guarda-chuva e ia a abri-lo, mas recuou. O que se passou na alma dele foi uma luta (...). O oficial queria abrigar-se da chuva, o amanuense queria apanhá-la, isto é, o poeta renascia contra as intempéries, sem medo ao mal, prestes a morrer por sua dama, como nos tempos da cavalaria. Guarda-chuva era ridículo; poupar-se à constipação desmentia a adoração. Tal foi a luta e o desfecho: venceu o amanuense, enquanto a chuva ia pingando grosso (...). Flora entrou e fechou a janela. (Assis, 2008b: 1197-98)

Machado pays a final homage to his rival Eça with this scene in his 1904 novel, just as Eça in *The City and the Mountains*, through a

diaphanous veil of satire, had composed his own novelistic reply to Machado's first two novels.

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ABSTRACT

By the late 1890s Eça de Queirós had certainly read Machado's two major novels to date, the *Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas* (1880-81) and *Quincas Borba* (1890), after acknowledging Machado's critiques of *Cousin Basílio*, published in *O Cruzeiro* in April, 1878. A novel form of indirect communication between the two authors can be located in their fiction. In *The City and the Mountains* (1901) Eça replies indirectly to Machado with a satire of several of Machado's main themes in the two novels, from the philosophy of "Humanitism" to the useful work of worms.

Keywords: Eça de Queirós; Machado de Assis; critiques; literary mirroring

RESUMO

Até o fim da década de 1890, Eça de Queirós já havia lido, sem dúvida, os dois grandes romances de Machado de Assis, *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas* (1880-1881) e *Quincas Borba* (1890), depois de ter respondido às críticas feitas por Machado a *O primo Basílio*, publicadas n' *O Cruzeiro* em abril de 1878. Uma forma inesperada de comunicação entre os dois autores pode ser apreciada na sua ficção. No romance *A cidade e as serras* (1901) Eça contesta Machado indiretamente com uma sátira de alguns dos temas principais nos dois romances mencionados, desde a filosofia do "Humanitismo" ao trabalho útil dos vermes.

Palavras-chave: Eça de Queirós; Machado de Assis; críticas; espelhamento literário