

“BUT THEN, WHAT WOULD CRITICISM BE?”<sup>1</sup>  
BALZAC READS STENDHAL, MACHADO READS EÇA

“MAS ENTÃO, O QUE SERIA A CRÍTICA?” BALZAC  
LÊ STENDHAL, MACHADO LÊ EÇA

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In a paper titled “Balzac journaliste”, read in March 2014 in Rio de Janeiro, Marie-Ève Thérénty, among other very interesting observations about the French novelist, stated that his long article about Stendhal’s *La Chartreuse de Parme*, published in *La Revue Parisienne* (September 25, 1840), is the best example of appropriation by Balzac of a novel he had not written. In Thérénty’s words: “The jubilation of the summary [of the novel’s plot] is followed by a gesture of re-writing and recomposing the novel”<sup>2</sup>. She concluded, with a wry smile: what Balzac criticized in Stendhal’s *La Chartreuse de Parme* was that it was not the novel that he, Balzac, would have written... had he written *La Chartreuse de Parme*.

1 This is the last sentence of the second of two pieces of criticism Machado de Assis wrote about *O primo Basílio* and *O crime do padre Amaro*, published in Rio de Janeiro, in *O Cruzeiro*, on April 16, and 30, 1878.

2 In the original: “à la jubilation du résumé succède le geste de réécriture et de recomposition de l’œuvre”. I had access to the paper thanks to Lúcia Granja, who, having acted as translator at the time, has kindly sent it to me. Slightly modified, the paper reproduces the introduction to Thérénty’s book (then only just published) *Balzac journaliste—articles et chroniques*. All translations in this paper are mine, unless otherwise specified.

On hearing that, I immediately thought: “This is precisely what is at the heart of Machado’s critical assessment of *O primo Basílio*”. More recently, I found a mention of something my good friend Jorge Fernandes da Silveira once said, probably in one of his Portuguese literature classes in the early 1970s: “Machado criticized the book he would never write”<sup>3</sup> (Gomes, 2002: 504). I was in good company.

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Allow me to start with a chiasmus. Not in the literary or rhetorical sense of “a balancing pattern in verse or prose, where the main elements are reversed”, but in the general sense of the word: a criss-cross, a crosswise arrangement. I would like to argue that Eça de Queirós (the author criticized by Machado de Assis) is to Balzac (the critic of Stendhal), as Machado (the critic of Eça) is to Stendhal (the author criticized by Balzac). This is what I will try to demonstrate.

In Chapter Four of *O primo Basílio*, Sebastião and his friend Julião talk about Basílio’s presence in Lisbon:

– Tu sabes que ele foi namoro da Luísa?—disse Sebastião, baixo, como assustado da gravidade da confidência.

(...)

Sim, ninguém o sabe. Nem Jorge. Eu soube-o há pouco, há meses. Foi. Estiveram para casar. Depois o pai faliu, ele foi para o Brasil, e de lá escreveu a romper o casamento.

Julião sorriu, e encostando a cabeça à parede:

3 In the original: “Machado criticou o livro que nunca escreveria”. Although Gomes’s reference is very vague, in 2015 I exchanged emails with Fernandes da Silveira, who confirmed he must have made the statement at the Catholic University of Rio, where he taught Portuguese literature for a long time.

– Mas isso é o enredo da *Eugênia Grandet*, Sebastião! Estás-me a contar o romance de Balzac! Isso é a *Eugênia Grandet*! (Queirós, 1966: 953)

The admission, through one of his characters, of the resemblance between the plot of his novel and that of Balzac is only one of the many references to the French novelist made by Eça de Queirós, not only in his fiction, but also in letters to friends. Any reader of *Os Maias* will remember that Vila Balzac is the name of João da Ega’s retreat in Penha de França, a suburb of Lisbon. Carlos da Maia praises Dom Diogo’s “Balzacian eye” (“um olho à Balzac”), which Ega also boasts of having. In *O conde de Abranhos* there are two references: to the author himself and to father Grandet, with his proverbial avarice.

As to Eça’s correspondence, one example is his letter to Silva Pinto, probably written in 1877, after the publication of *O crime do padre Amaro*, where he overtly declares his affiliation to Balzac and Flaubert, adding: “Isto bastará para fazer compreender as minhas intenções e a minha estética” (Castilho, 1983, vol. 1: 183). He also writes to Teófilo Braga on March 12, 1878, soon after the publication of his second novel, expressing his sadness for not being a match to Balzac: “Pobre de mim—nunca poderei dar a sublime nota da realidade eterna, como o divino Balzac (...)” (Queirós, 1966b: 517-18). And this is not to mention his idea of writing a kind of Portuguese “Comédie humaine”, “Cenas da vida portuguesa”, which he ended by never producing as such, but about which he wrote several times to his friends, among them the same Teófilo Braga, and his publisher in Oporto, Ernesto Chardron:

Eu tenho uma ideia, que penso daria excelente resultado. É uma coleção de pequenos romances, não excedendo de 180 a 200 páginas, que fosse a pintura da vida contemporânea em Portugal: Lisboa, Porto, províncias: políticos, negociantes, fidalgos, jogadores, advogados, médicos—todas

as classes, todos os costumes entrariam nessa galeria. A coisa poderia chamar-se “Cenas da Vida Portuguesa”. (*apud* Rosa, 1963: 106)

Stendhal, however, is hardly ever mentioned in Eça’s works.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, in the foreword addressed to the reader of Machado’s *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas*, the narrator states: “Que Stendhal confessasse haver escrito um de seus livros para cem leitores, cousa é que admira e consterna” (Assis, 2008: 625).<sup>5</sup> Balzac is referred to just twice in Machado’s fiction, in two different short stories, “Um homem superior” (1873) and “O empréstimo” (1882). Though alluding to Stendhal only twice as many times,<sup>6</sup> Machado reveals a more intimate knowledge of his production, alluding to two different books, *De l’amour* and *La Chartreuse de Parme*. Of Balzac, he only mentions the name, although in his library he had as many as seventeen volumes of “La comédie humaine”, one volume of his plays, one of his “contes drôlatiques” and one of his correspondence. It is perhaps relevant to note that, though Stendhal was a much less prolific novelist than Balzac, Machado was the owner of twenty-two works by the author of *Le rouge et le noir* (Massa, 2002: 86-87). Machado’s difference from Balzac is very well summed up by

4 In a letter to the French editor of *La Revue Universelle*, which became a preface to *O mandarim* from its fifth, posthumous edition onwards, Eça de Queirós does mention Stendhal, only to say that, if he were ever read in Portugal, he would not be valued by the public. I thank Professor Carlos Reis for this information, which he kindly gave me at Indiana University, in October 2015.

5 In the preface (written in 1834) to the second edition (1853) of his *De l’amour* (1822), Stendhal does say he has written the book for one hundred readers: “Je n’écris que pour cent lecteurs” (Stendhal, 1857: xv).

6 Three times in *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas* and once in the short story “Maria Cora” (first version in *A Estação*, 1898, with the title “Relógio parado”; second version in *Relíquias da casa velha*, 1906).

Franco Moretti in his *The Bourgeois: Between History and Literature* (Moretti, 2014: 151-55) in a small sub-chapter where he discusses the relation that one of Balzac's characters (Doguereau, from *Les illusions perdues*) and Brás Cubas have with money—a topic I intend to recall briefly a little later in this essay.

Besides detecting the affinity between Eça de Queirós and Balzac and between Machado de Assis and Stendhal, I claim that it is on the basis of this affinity that Machado criticizes *O primo Basílio* and, less extensively, *O crime do padre Amaro*.

The critic objects to “um autor que não esquece nada, e não oculta nada” and to the new aesthetics (Realism/Naturalism), for which perfection is to be reached only “no dia em que nos disser o número exato dos fios de que se compõe um lenço de cambraia ou um esfregão de cozinha” (Assis, 1973, vol. 3: 902). In short, Machado critiques Eça's first two novels for four main reasons. The first is the author's excessive fidelity to Zola's version of Naturalism, later mostly known as Realism. The second reason is the fact that Luísa, the main female character of *O primo Basílio*, is a puppet rather than a moral person. The third characteristic Machado abhors is the display of a certain pleasure in the description of what is immoral and repulsive, which he conceives as a concession to the reader's taste. The fourth main motive for his disapproval is what he considers to be a substitution of the accessory for the principal.

As any reader interested in the reception of Eça's second novel knows, nothing here is substantially different from what Ramalho Ortigão had said in his article printed in the *Gazeta de Notícias* just a couple of weeks earlier, on March 28, 1878, immediately after the publication of the novel. In Ramalho's opinion, it displayed bad taste, described things in too much detail, was too graphic, and the characters were inconsistent (except for Juliana) (*apud* Nascimento, 2007: 160-62). More relevant to my argument, however, is the let-

ter Eça de Queirós addressed to Rodrigues de Freitas, on March 30, 1878, thanking him for praising the novel, and for the defense of his “school”: “O que lhe agradeço é a sua defesa geral do ‘Realismo’. Os meus romances importarão pouco; (...) o que importa é o triunfo do Realismo” (Castilho, 1983, vol. 1: 140-42). Now, this was precisely what Machado de Assis reproached most earnestly, as he would clearly state the following year, in another famous piece of criticism<sup>7</sup>: “A realidade é boa. O realismo é que não presta para nada” (Assis, 1973, vol. 3: 830).

A lot has been written about the matter, Eça’s defenders in Brazil having taken less than a week to react fiercely to Machado’s article.<sup>8</sup> One century later, in the late 1990s, Marisa Lajolo ventured a good-humored imputation of market-oriented bias. She claims that Machado’s condemnation of Eça’s novel was a kind of strategy to undermine the prestige of a book about adultery, arriving in Brazil when Machado himself was probably already ruminating over a novel also dealing with adultery, among other subjects—*Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas*, published in serial form in 1880 and in book form in 1881 (Lajolo, 2002: 438-45).

Though not endorsing Lajolo’s suspicion of Machado’s ill-natured market awareness—which, in intellectual and artistic terms, would have been an act of blunt ill-faith—I will accept her hint that we should read Machado’s criticism in the context of the production

7 “A nova geração”, originally published in the *Revista Brasileira* on December 1, 1879.

8 To those interested in the polemic, I recommend José Leonardo do Nascimento’s book *O primo Basílio na imprensa brasileira do século XIX* (2007). For a clever summary of the whole discussion, see Monica Figueiredo’s “Eça de Queiroz: um escritor que seduziu o Brasil”, in the new edition of the *Dicionário de Eça de Queirós*, published in 2015 in Portugal by Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda.

of his own fictional work. However, I propose we should consider not *Brás Cubas*, but Machado's preceding novel, *Iaiá Garcia*.<sup>9</sup>

Few people are aware that its first edition (1878) is sprinkled with "naturalistic" terms and expressions, like "instinto" or "índole", all of them banished by the author in the second and definitive edition (1899), upon which subsequent editions have been based. The best example is perhaps the one in Chapter Thirteen, when Estela is in conflict between her "compressed love" ("amor comprimido") for Jorge and the "domestic tranquility" ("tranquilidade doméstica") she experiences with Luís Garcia. In the first version, the narrator's vocabulary is absolutely in consonance with Naturalism: "não poderia nunca misturar esta água com aquele lodo" (Assis, 1878: 231); in the second version the comment is suppressed.

When writing *Iaiá Garcia*, would Machado have been under the influence of the new school that he calls—as does Eça, most of the time—"Realismo"? Was Machado under the spell of the new trend he so intensely disapproved in his article about Eça's novels? Or, instead, adopting Lajolo's "market-oriented" approach, was Machado aware when writing *Iaiá Garcia* of the need to make concessions to the public's taste, something he emphatically condemns Eça for?

José Luiz Passos, in his *Machado de Assis—o romance com pessoas*, was, to my knowledge, the first critic to stress the importance of *Iaiá Garcia* in connection with Machado's critical piece about Eça de Queirós. The last part of the novel had been issued merely two months before, in the very same journal (*O Cruzeiro*) where his April 1878 attack of *O primo Basílio* was published. Passos dwells upon the scene, in Chapter Ten, in which Iaiá, then seventeen years old,

9 Regina Zilberman reads *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas* as Machado's response to *O primo Basílio*. See the third chapter of her *Brás Cubas autor, Machado de Assis leitor*, especially pp. 108-21.

takes note of Estela's reaction when her husband shows her a letter addressed to him by Jorge some years before. In the letter, Jorge uncovers to Luís Garcia his "undying" love for a young woman whom he does not name, but is, of course, Estela. Iaiá immediately realizes that her stepmother had loved Jorge in the past and still does in the present. In the girl's view, this threatens her beloved father's happiness. Nothing is said. Estela does not even realize Iaiá has guessed her secret. Here is how the narrator sums it up:

Iaiá adivinhou o passado de Estela; mas adivinhou demais. Galgou a realidade até cair no possível. Supôs um vínculo anterior ao casamento, roto contra a vontade de ambos, talvez persistente, mau grado aos tempos e às cousas. Tudo isso viu uma simples inocência de 17 anos. Seu pensamento cristalino e virginal, nunca embaciado pela experiência, ignorava até as primeiras cismas de donzela. Não tinha ideia do mal; não conhecia as vicissitudes do coração. Jardim fechado, como a esposa do *Cântico*, viu subitamente rasgar-se-lhe uma porta, e esses dez minutos foram a sua puberdade moral. A criança acabara; principiava a mulher. (Assis, 2008: 567)

At the same time when Iaiá Garcia reaches her moral puberty, Machado in turn reaches his own aesthetic and ethical maturity. That is to say, as Iaiá will change her behavior and her way of facing life, so will Machado change his conception and construction of plot and character. From *Iaiá Garcia* on, he will engage his fiction in the shaping of "moral persons" ("pessoas morais"), characters that are faced with ethical dilemmas; characters similar to Iaiá Garcia, who, according to Passos, "é (...) a primeira protagonista do romance brasileiro a mudar drasticamente, a evoluir moral e psicologicamente entre a abertura e a conclusão da obra" (Passos, 2007: 93). Machado's urge



at the time he writes his review is indeed to create morally complex and psychologically sophisticated characters.

Now, one is entirely aware of the huge difference, in more than one aspect, between books written by Eça at different times and circumstances, namely between the books written at the beginning of his career as a novelist and the books written from *Os Maias* on. But at that specific moment, 1878, what did Eça’s novels present to the critic? Characters completely dominated by their social environment, literature produced as a caricature of the world of bourgeois values, as an instrument of an aesthetic revolution, as part of a program of social moralization. In the words of Carlos Reis:

Os primeiros romances queirosianos – *O crime do Padre Amaro* e *O primo Basílio* – são caracteristicamente obras de tese. Nelas, para além disso, circulam tipos que reclamam uma representatividade social e cultural ajustada ao propósito crítico que inspirava ambos os romances. (...) [R]epresentam [essas personagens] comportamentos e mentalidades típicas que fazem de ambos os romances repositórios muito sugestivos de cenários humanos que deveriam ser corrigidos. (Reis, 2005: 87)

Since his Coimbra days, Eça had been attracted to Proudhon—I remember Eduardo Lourenço’s most fortunate definition of the young Eça as the son of Proudhon and King Arthur (Lourenço, 2007: 707) –, fascinated by Spencer’s social organism, by Taine’s determinism. Eça was then totally devoted to the cause of a revolutionary, “utilitarian” literature, to writing novels with which he would awaken the Portuguese readers from their moral, educational and cultural lethargy. As Eça admits to his friend Teófilo Braga in the same letter I mentioned above, “uma sociedade [a lisboeta] sobre estas falsas bases, não está na verdade: atacá-las é um dever. E neste ponto *O primo Basílio* não está inteiramente fora da arte revolu-

cionária, creio” (Queirós, 1966b, vol. 3: 517). In short: in 1876 (the first version of *O crime do padre Amaro*, the one Machado read<sup>10</sup>), and 1878 (*O primo Basílio*), Eça de Queirós, as well as many writers of his generation, were at the service of a logic that dictated the subordination of their characters to the surrounding milieu. Isabel Pires de Lima, concisely, speaks of a naturalistic program of social moralization, which Eça pursued at the time (Lima, 2007: 716).

In the late 1870s, one could very easily apply, with regard to Eça and his companions of the famous Geração Coimbrã, Paul Bourget’s words about the French novelists directly submitted to Flaubert’s influence: “*s’applicant surtout à la transcription des milieux, ils ont supprimé de plus en plus de leurs livres l’étude de la volonté*” (1885: 166. My emphasis).<sup>11</sup>

It has been repeatedly said that Schopenhauer was very influential in Machado de Assis. Even Wikipedia, in its French version, concedes it: “La philosophie de Schopenhauer a eu une influence importante sur de très nombreux écrivains, philosophes ou artistes majeurs du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle et du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle: Gustave Flaubert, (...) Guy de Maupassant, Friedrich Nietzsche, (...) Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis, Émile Zola, (...) Fiodor Dostoïevski, (...) Henri Bergson, Ludwig Wittgenstein, André Gide, (...)” (Wikipedia).<sup>12</sup> Understandably, Schopenhauer’s view of the world as absurd and senseless, as well as his somber pessimism seem to be akin to Machado’s own inclination to disenchantment and moral skepticism. How-

10 Alberto Machado da Rosa examines the third edition (1880), showing how Machado’s advice was followed by Eça. See Rosa (1963), especially Chapters Eighteen and Nineteen.

11 It is curious, though irrelevant to my argument, that Bourget should identify this prevalence of the social context in Flaubert, and not in Zola, for example.

12 The English version of Wikipedia does not list Machado among the writers influenced by the German philosopher. I use this source only to stress that Schopenhauer’s influence on Western thought has become common knowledge.

ever, I would like to sustain that, more importantly, what Machado is in the process of realizing in the last two years of the 1870s is that the crucial, fundamental, inalienable trait of each of us individuals of the human species is the predominance of the will over the intellect. By then, possibly Machado had not yet read Schopenhauer. However, he was familiar with “the principle of Helvétius”, which he uses as the title of Chapter 113 of *Memórias póstumas*, although the author’s *De l’esprit* (1758) is not present in Massa’s inventory of Machado’s library.

Helvétius brought to French philosophy a theory of human character, and a new analysis of morals—namely, interest being the basis of justice, and pleasure the true interpretation of interest (Morley, 1880: 322). In fact, what our novelist seems to be telling us with his book of 1880-1881 is that self-interest, founded on the love of pleasure and the avoidance of pain, is the only source of each individual’s judgment, action, and even affection. Self-sacrifice itself is a result of the fact that the sensation of pleasure it provokes outweighs the corresponding pain and thus it is always a consequence of calculation—a concept not very far from Schopenhauer’s “Will”. If not with the metaphysical implications of the concept as expressed by the German philosopher in his major work, by the late 1870s Machado seems to be beginning to realize that the individual *is* indeed a manifestation of the “Will”. R. J. Hollingdale notes that one of the reasons for Schopenhauer’s success is his thesis according to which the will is primary, while intellect is secondary (Hollingdale, 1970: 35). The intellect is a mere tool of the will, which determines all human actions. One can hardly think of anything more Machadean than such prevalence.

Moretti’s example I alluded to a few pages earlier attests to it. On the one hand, Moretti cites Doguereau’s rational decision to pay less money for the novel *Lucien de Rubrampé* had handed him (which he

found excellent, by the way); on the other, he discusses Brás Cubas's emotional decision to give the muleteer a lot less than he planned to at the start, when the poor man saved his life. Moretti's use of the two scenes serves a different purpose, of course, as he is discussing the capitalist mentality in Balzac's France as opposed to Machado's still semi-feudal Brazil. Doguereau is a bourgeois inside and out. Brás conceives of himself as a liberal aristocrat. Doguereau is a trader; his attitude is purely mercantile, and he thus considers only supply and demand, price, risk, interest, and loss. Brás's attitude emanates from his will, the will of a voluble and idle man, whose life is ruled by a sterile egoism.<sup>13</sup> More examples are to be easily found in Machado's fiction, like the will of the simple-minded Rubião (*Quincas Borba*), a victim, in his turn, of the voracious will of unscrupulous Palha and his wife Sofia. One can also think of the will of the obstinate Bento Santiago (*Dom Casmurro*), determined to prove a crime (adultery) that the reader's reason leads him or her to believe may never have occurred, except in the narrator's imagination.

In an essay dated 1969, but still very pertinent, Gérard Genette notes that Stendhal was a disciple of Helvétius (1969: 176). In fact, when very young, when he was not even "Stendhal" yet, but simply Henry Beyle, he was very impressed by the "idéologues", Helvétius among them. In a letter to his sister Pauline, dated February 8, 1803, he sustains that "les passions sont le seul mobile des hommes".<sup>14</sup> If, as I said before, Helvétius's *De l'esprit* was not found in what was left of Machado's library, two volumes of Stendhal's *Correspondance* were. Stendhal's cousin and executioner, Romain

13 The Machadean reader will remember Brás's behavior concerning the division of his parents' properties and assets between himself and his sister (and brother-in-law, of course), in Chapter Forty-six of *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas*.

14 See also Jules Alciatore (1952), especially p. 133; and Victor Del Litto (1962).

Colomb, published his correspondence in 1855. The first volume contains a kind of preface by Mérimé, titled "Notes et souvenirs". On its third page, the author declares that Stendhal "citait souvent Helvétius avec grande admiration, et même il m'obligea de lire le livre de l'Esprit" (Stendhal, 1855: vii). It is possible to speculate that Stendhal, whose most important heroes are "Helvetian" in their own peculiar way, might have aroused Machado's interest in Helvétius. Remember, for example, Julien Sorel, whose soul, according to Georges Blin, "était chargée de volonté jusqu'à la gueule" (Blin, 1983: 163). Think of the ambiguous Duchess Sanseverina, moving heavens and earth to free her beloved nephew from prison, much more to serve her own egoistic and unavowable love for him than for truly altruistic reasons. Consider Fabrice willingly returning to the Farnese Tower, much to his aunt's despair, only to expose himself to the most painful existence, just for the pleasure of being near Clelia Conti.

Stendhal's characters are unpredictable and indefinable, and are endowed with numerous and contradictory sentiments. And they are invariably moved by their passion (or will, or interest), here understood as the result of confused and conflicting forces that propel them into actions that most of the time bring doom to them. In Leyla Perrone-Moisés's words, the Stendhalian character "é uma entidade em vias de constituir-se na própria narrativa" (2006: 24). As to Stendhal's relation with exactness, Georges Blin points out that his carelessness reached the extent of condemning Julien Sorel by virtue of a certain article 1432 of the penal code, which in fact had no more than 484 articles (1983: 39). Stendhal had a kind of phobia of the inventory, the catalogue and the exhaustive material descriptions: "L'inventaire, le catalogue et les exhaustives 'descriptions matérielles', dont Stendhal avait la phobie" (Blin, 1983: 36). Let us listen to Genette once again:

Le propre du discours stendhalien n'est pas la clarté; moins encore l'obscurité (qu'il avait en horreur, comme cache-sottise et complice de l'*hypocrisie*). Mais quelque chose comme une transparence énigmatique, qui toujours, ici où là, déconcerte quelque ressource ou habitude de l'esprit. (1969: 192. Emphasis in the original)

We seem to be treading on Machadean grounds.

Balzac's characters, for their part, are more consistent, less paradoxical, behaving in a way that the reader can easily foresee. For Balzac, it seems that characters have no intrinsic importance; they become more interesting and meaningful the more they represent a social group, the more they are a kind of incarnation of a conflict between opposite interests, conditioned by their class. For Balzac, it is as if men and women only exist in the context of their social insertion. As noted by an old Marxist cultural historian, "la *Comédie Humaine* debe su íntima unidad no a los encadenamientos de su acción (...) sino al predominio de la causalidad social y al hecho de que es, efectivamente, (...) la historia de la moderna sociedad francesa" (Hauser, 1969, vol. 3: 60).<sup>15</sup> Marie-Ève Thérénty seems to think along the same lines: "Balzac se donnera pour tâche d'explorer les espèces sociales, comme Buffon (...) l'avait fait des espèces animales. (...) Balzac faisant concurrence à la science sociale naissante" (2014: 30). As to style, Balzac knows how to use space description, character portraits and dialogues in a way that the reader becomes increasingly interested in the development of the plot. The affinity with Eça's first two novels is self-evident.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> I quote (and translate) from the Spanish edition of the work, originally published in German, in 1951, with the title *Sozialgeschichte der Kunst und Literatur*.

<sup>16</sup> Aníbal Pinto de Castro gives solid evidence of Eça's fascination for Balzac, an author he admitted to emulate in the beginning of his career. See *Balzac em Portugal*, especially the chapter "Balzac e Eça de Queirós" (pp. 161-99).

It is perhaps interesting to note that Eça’s fiction will never return to such an open “Naturalism” as revealed (or should I say “professed”) in his two first novels. I would not go as far as suggesting, as does Alberto Machado da Rosa, that Eça would have learned Machado’s lesson, although Eça admitted several times to his friends (mostly Ramalho Ortigão and Teófilo Braga) that he wanted to be taught, or lectured: “Eu tenho a paixão de ser *leccionado*: e basta darem-me a entender o bom caminho para eu me atirar por ele”, Eça affirmed (Queirós, 1966, vol. 3: 518. Emphasis in the original). I agree with Carlos Reis when he notes that, on the one hand, Machado’s criticism was pertinent at least to some extent, and, certainly, Eça would have admitted it. On the other hand, as Eça progressed as a writer of fiction, his trust in the aesthetic and ideological qualities of the naturalistic novel would surely have begun to crumble independent of Machado’s influence (Reis, 2005: 89).

In any case, let us not care too much about the polemic Machado’s article aroused in Rio de Janeiro. Let us not lament the harshness of his judgment of a fellow writer. Let us not be deceived by Eça’s polite and equally cutting reaction to it. Let us not be misled by Eduardo Prado’s, or Domício da Gama’s, or Magalhães de Azeredo’s testimonial of mutual admiration between Eça and Machado in the later years of the nineteenth century—however true Machado’s praise of the short stories “José Matias” and “Perfeição”, or of *A ilustre casa de Ramires* may have been;<sup>17</sup> however likely Eça’s admiration

17 In a letter dated July 21, 1897 to Magalhães de Azeredo about the *Revista Moderna*, which Machado’s friend had sent him from Paris: “Os dois contos de Eça de Queiroz, ‘Perfeição’ e ‘José Matias’, são lindos”. In a letter to the same Magalhães de Azeredo, this time dated December 7, 1897: “Começamos aqui a ler *A ilustre casa de Ramires* (...). A arte com que está posta, desenhada e pintada a principal figura é realmente admirável, e não é preciso falar particularmente da língua e do estilo, que fazem parte dele” (Lyra, 1965: 199-200).

for *Memórias póstumas* may also have been.<sup>18</sup> Let us, instead, enjoy the prose, the style, the richness of these two novelists who, while so different one from the other, are, to this day, as are Balzac and Stendhal in the French literary tradition, the two greatest novelists of Lusophone literature.

It is time to conclude. In a precious article almost lost in an obscure Rio de Janeiro literary journal, now extinct, Marlene de Castro Correia states that the exercise of criticism is difficult for Machado neither for personal reasons (his notorious shyness or aversion to controversy) nor for sociological ones (the scarceness of Brazilian literary production at the time). This has been claimed by analysts of different generations, but Correia claims it is difficult because it is hardly possible to reconcile the polished courtesy he imposed on himself as a critic (as he does in 1865, in “O ideal do crítico”) with the irony and humor which are soon to be the mark of his aesthetic manner. The paucity of Machado’s pieces of “pure” criticism, however—argues Correia—is made up for by the literary criticism that he voices *within* his own fiction.

Machado’s “impure” criticism (the one he carries out not in articles, but in his novels and short stories) chastises most of all commonplace, bombastic, manneristic, affected, and pedantic writing. Eça de Queirós equally abominates them. If we stick to *O primo Basílio*, we will realize that Ernestinho Ledesma’s play *Honra e paixão*, besides its structural function in the book (as pointed out by Silviano Santiago),<sup>19</sup> serves the author in the purpose of exposing the ridiculous nature of the vain, empty, pointless, “sub-romantic” literature

18 Eça supposedly knew by heart the pages of Chapter Seven of *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas*, titled “O delírio” (Moog, 1966: 287).

19 See Santiago (1978). The chapter itself was written as an independent article, in 1970. See also Reis (2005), p. 16.



produced in Portugal (and in Brazil) at the time. Machado could very well have subscribed to this strategy –perhaps less emphatically, with fewer adjectives, with less intensity. If one remembers his “oradores de sobremesa”, characters who make long, fastidious speeches at the close of ceremonial meals;<sup>20</sup> if we consider his pompous and vacuous verse makers;<sup>21</sup> if we recall the implacable irony used in the description of José Dias, enraptured with his own rhetorical “pearls”, we will easily verify that Eça and Machado have a lot in common.

However, if Castro Correia is right (as I believe she is) when she sustains that, although Machado wrote just a few articles of “pure” criticism and rather went on “writing” it inside his own fiction, I would like to suggest that, in this sense, *Dom Casmurro* (1899) is the finest and most subtle Machadean piece of criticism of *O primo Basílio*. Which takes us back to the title of this paper: but then, what would criticism be?

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20 Like the ones in the short stories “Valério” and “Adão e Eva”, and in *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas*.

21 Like Luís Tinoco, from the short story “Aurora sem dia”.

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#### ABSTRACT

In 1840, Balzac wrote an article about Stendhal's *La Chartreuse de Parme*. Though praising the book's qualities, in the final paragraphs Balzac is very critical of the book, in a way that leads us to infer that what he criticizes in *La Chartreuse de Parme* is that it is not the novel he would have written himself. In 1878, Machado de Assis wrote two articles about *O primo Basílio*, then recently published by Eça de Queirós. Identifying affinities between Eça and Balzac and between Machado and Stendhal, this paper claims that the Brazilian criticism of the Portuguese novel is based on these affinities. In other words, Machado's condemnation of Eça's submissiveness to Realism/Naturalism originates in his own need to create characters as “moral persons”, whose actions are triggered by their innermost motives. Among such motives stands out the prevalence of the will over the intellect, of personal interest over the influence of circumstances, which is more akin to the

heroes of Stendhal than to Balzac's characters, a model Eça admittedly tried to emulate in the beginning of his career as a novelist.

*Keywords:* Machado de Assis; Eça de Queirós; Balzac; Stendhal; realism-naturalism

#### RESUMO

Em 1840, Balzac escreveu um artigo sobre *La Chartreuse de Parme*, de Stendhal. Embora louvasse as qualidades do romance, nos parágrafos finais Balzac é muito crítico e nos leva a inferir que o que critica é que o livro não é o que ele, Balzac, teria escrito. Em 1878, Machado de Assis escreveu dois artigos sobre *O primo Basílio*, de Eça de Queirós, então recentemente publicado. Identificando afinidades entre Eça e Balzac e entre Machado e Stendhal, o presente artigo argumenta que a crítica do brasileiro ao romance português baseia-se nessa afinidade. Em outras palavras: a condenação à submissão de Eça ao Realismo/Naturalismo tem origem na necessidade do próprio Machado de criar personagens que sejam “pessoas morais”, cujas ações são deflagradas por seus motivos mais recônditos. Entre tais motivos, destaca-se a prevalência da vontade sobre o intelecto, do interesse pessoal sobre a influência das circunstâncias, o que se assemelha mais aos heróis de Stendhal do que aos de Balzac, modelo este que Eça admite ter tentado emular no início de sua carreira de romancista.

*Palavras-chave:* Machado de Assis; Eça de Queirós; Balzac; Stendhal; realismo-naturalismo