

ADAM AND EVE ACCORDING TO EÇA AND MACHADO

ADÃO E EVA SEGUNDO EÇA E MACHADO

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Both Eça de Queirós and Machado de Assis chose, in the form of the short story, to retell one of the most familiar narratives of all time. Machado first published “Adão e Eva” in the *Gazeta de notícias* in 1885, and Eça contributed “Adão e Eva no paraíso” to the *Almanaque enciclopédico* in 1897. Naturally, neither author would have simply transcribed the original narrative without making significant modifications, without “defamiliarizing” the well-known account.

The process of “defamiliarization”, according to Viktor Shklovsky and other members of the Russian Formalist school, is a means whereby factors that might otherwise be received in an automatic and passive fashion are made strange, roughened or attenuated, thereby causing a heightened perception on the part of the reader. According to Shklovsky, the most natural human tendency is to reduce habitual perceptions to a kind of algebra, or perhaps a system of acronyms, whereby they are registered in the most economical possible way. The end result is that these familiar phenomena are barely even perceived: “And so life is reckoned as nothing. Habituation devours works, clothes, furniture, one’s wife, and the fear of war” (1965: 12). Art, then, exists to jar the preceptor out of this lazy and customary mode of perception: “And art exists that one

may recover the sensations of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*” (1965: 12). Because of its familiarity, the Edenic narrative is susceptible to a facile, superficial manner of perception, where nothing is questioned or wondered about. However, both Eça and Machado clearly cast the Biblical creation story in a deautomatizing mode, and any reading of these stories must involve some kind of contrastive analysis, where jarring differences between Genesis and the short stories are taken into account.

By looking at Machado’s version in light of Eça’s (and vice versa), I propose a contrastive exercise in another direction. It is well known that Eça was a committed proponent of Realism/Naturalism, and that his novels helped introduce the values of those movements both in Portugal and in Brazil.¹ His contribution to the polemical “Conferências do Casino”, entitled “O realismo como nova expressão da arte”, is his best-known personal statement on the movement (Reis, 1990: 135-42). It is equally well known that Machado adamantly and publicly resisted those new esthetic programs. Nowhere could this resistance be more evident than in his famous critique of Eça’s novel, *O primo Basílio* (3: 903-13). The short stories in question will not lead us to any sort of revision of this established knowledge; rather, I hope they will illuminate the differences with the specificity of a case study, based on a familiar and foundational narrative.

A body of conventional wisdom surrounds the Biblical story of Adam and Eve, partly deriving from specific details of the Old Testament text itself, and partly the product of a centuries-old receptive tradition. Perhaps the first point of this collective lore is that the creation occurred within a matter of days, that God made Adam on the sixth day (Genesis 1.27-31) and that He added Eve shortly thereafter. Secondly, there is the idea that Adam and Eve were given a position

1 See Coleman, 1980: 1-69; Reis, 2005; Santos, 2003; Sousa, 2001.

of superiority, having been made in the image of God (1.27), and that therefore they had “dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth” (1.26). A third concept is that Eden was a paradise, a perfect space free from strife and toil. This idea appears primarily to come from the fact that God expelled the first parents after their disobedience, and that outside of the garden, they were obliged to cultivate a “cursed” ground, full of thorns and thistles, and to eat their bread “in sorrow” and “in the sweat” of their faces (3.17-19). Fourthly, we have the idea that this “fall” from Eden into an inferior world also involved a transition from immortality to mortality. Death was a required outcome of eating the forbidden fruit: Adam would “return unto the ground; for out of it was thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (3:19). Fifth, conventional wisdom connects this transition out an immortal condition with the inception of sexuality, and of reproductive capacity. In the garden, Adam and Eve had been naked, but in their innocence they “were not ashamed” (2.25). After partaking of the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil “the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons” (3.7). Later their naked bodies would be clothed with “coats of skins” (3.21). Accepted wisdom connects the consciousness of nakedness with the beginnings of sexual desire and procreative activity. Adam and Eve now understand the commandment to “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth” (1.28). Finally, it seems that conventional wisdom places a burden of culpability upon Adam and Eve, regarding them as “original sinners” who are responsible for introducing suffering into the human condition. And in placing this blame, an extra measure is given to Eve, since it was she who first partook of the fruit. In the text, God told Eve, “I will greatly

multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee” (3.16). In the popular imagination, Eve’s more active role in accepting the fruit seems to justify this greater penalty. As we will see, these are the primary concepts that both Eça de Queirós and Machado de Assis will entertain in their stories, often casting them in an ironic, alien or defamiliarizing light.

In “Adão e Eva no paraíso”, Eça follows the general program of Naturalism, but without the political engagement that is so characteristic of his major novels. In part, this lack of stridency seems to confirm the lighter, more complacent tone of the third and final phase of the author’s literary development (Santos, 2003: 23-25). Besides, it would have been difficult for the author to convert the creation story into a critique of political problems in Portugal, given its huge distance in time and space from contemporary Portuguese reality. The story places great emphasis on the setting, as the title suggests. This is consistent with the Naturalist assertion that environment has a powerful influence upon life, requiring adaptation to its conditions. The story posits the question of whether the original version of Paradise would in fact have been such a favorable place. Eça does this by creating a primordial space much more in line with prevailing evolutionary theory, and suggesting that the noble characteristics of the human race are dependent on this more challenging environment.

The Portuguese author’s version begins with a kind of joke, playing on the Biblical notion that Adam was created in a day: “Adão, pai dos homens, foi criado no dia 28 de Outubro, às 2 horas da tarde” (Queirós, n.d.: 776). The narrator declares that Adam is created at the moment when he comes down out of his tree:

Então, numa floresta muito cerrada e muito tenebrosa, certo Ser, desprendendo lentamente a garra do galho de árvore onde se empoleirara

toda essa manhã de longos séculos, escorregou pelo tronco comido de hera, pousou as duas patas no solo que o musgo afofava, sobre as duas patas se firmou com esforçada energia, e ficou erecto, e alargou os braços livres, e lançou um passo forte, e sentiu a sua dissemelhança da animalidade, e concebeu o deslumbrado pensamento de que era, e verdadeiramente *foi!* (777)

Here the story makes allowances for the familiar wisdom regarding an instantaneous creation of the first man, by conflating that moment with the time when he first came down from his tree, at the same time creating a sense of strangeness by showing that Adam existed, perhaps in a long series of generations, before he “verdadeiramente *foi*”.

Physically, Eça’s Adam can only remind us of an ape. His body is covered with “um pêlo crespo e luzido” (777) and his nose has “ventas chatas” (778). The text thus defamiliarizes the notion of nakedness as it is presented in Genesis. The furry skin is not an artificial covering, borrowed from another species and made by his own hand, but rather his very own. When Eve arrives upon the scene, she is also hairy, but has “um pêlo mais sedoso” (786). The conventional notion of femininity as it relates to the human epidermis, where the woman’s is of a finer and smoother texture with little or no hair—that notion is made strange yet familiar, for it is the fur that is “mais sedoso” and not the skin itself.

Initially, Adam must fight against the urge to climb back up into a tree or to walk with both his hands and his feet on the ground (778). The defamiliarizing notion of the first father’s simian origins is never far from Eça’s representation.

Unlike the original Garden of Eden, where all creatures coexist in a suspension of peaceful tranquility, Eça’s Paradise is a scene of urgent competition among the species. In a fanciful anachronism,

Adam watches a magnificent battle between an Ichthyosaurus and a Plesiosaurus, in which the latter kills the former. Adam is drawn by the smell of the enormous corpse. Plunging his hand into one of the wounds, he grasps a bloody shred of muscle and places it in his mouth. After this first taste of meat, he is forever changed, never again completely able to return to his prior diet of greens and berries (784). Conventional wisdom surrounding Genesis banishes death from the Garden of Eden and connects it with the outside world. In Eça's deautomatized version, hunting and the eating of meat are made emblems of death, and are essential conditions of that environment.

Eça's Eden is then a space of hunters and their prey. The entire animal kingdom seems dedicated to making Adam their meal. But God has placed a guardian angel by his side to protect him until he learns to protect himself with superior shelter (786). Rather than existing in a suspension of innocence, which is where Genesis puts them before they partake of the fruit of knowledge, Adam and Eve's Paradise is a learning laboratory and embodies the Darwinian paradigm: "O seu constante e desesperado esforço foi sobreviver no meio de uma Natureza que, sem cessar e furiosamente, tramava a sua destruição" (787). The dangers and suffering of their precarious existence lead to important advances. Adam and Eve learn to confront earthquakes, floods and droughts. Insistent hunger causes Adam to discover the virtues of a pointed branch, and later to invent the spear (792). As Adam and his wife chip away at stones to make spear and arrow heads, they are amazed to see sparks. Soon they learn about the enormous benefits of fire, including the cooking of food. Eve, with her superior patience and resourcefulness, learns she can start a fire at will, and extend its light and heat by controlling its fuel (792-93). She begins to use pointed bones and fibers to sew together skins, which provide protection against the elements, and render their own body hair redundant (794-95). They learn that not all ani-

mals are their enemies. After allowing a dog to share their dwelling, they discover a new world of domesticated breeding and husbandry (795). They begin to gather the seeds of native grasses, and to give them purposeful cultivation (795). With their herds and agriculture, Adam and Eve are now relieved of their precarious, nomadic existence, more able to establish themselves in a stable environment, and are poised to have their offspring, to develop that primordial society that will evolve into the world's first city (795-96).

In Eça's version, there is no particular awakening by which Adam and Eve become conscious of their nakedness, or aware of their sexuality. The story gives us no shift from immortality to mortality, no expulsion from Paradise to coincide with the onset of reproduction. Adam and Eve's multiplication is treated in a rather cursory manner, as a predictable aspect of their gradual development: "No entanto, bem podemos supor que Abel nasceu—e, uns após outros, os dias deslizam no Paraíso, mais seguros e fáceis" (795).

As can be seen, the Portuguese writer's version of our first parents leans heavily toward evolutionary models, concentrating in that single couple the countless millennia through which species have emerged, and through which human civilization has advanced. But the tale is not dogmatically Darwinian. Eça's narrator ends on a rather poetic note, which Juan Paredes Nuñez calls "una extensa moraleja" (1980: 314), and which seems almost to reconcile secular and spiritual understanding:

Mas enfim, desde que nosso Pai venerável não teve a providência ou a abnegação de declinar a grande supremacia—continuemos a reinar sobre a Criação e a ser sublimes... Sobretudo continuemos a usar, insaciavelmente, do dom melhor que Deus nos concedeu entre todos os dons, o mais puro, o único genuinamente grande, o dom de O amar—pois que não nos concedeu também o dom de O compreender. E não esqueça-

mos que Ele já nos ensinou, através de vozes levantadas em Galileia, e sob as mangueiras de Veluvana, e nos vales severos de Yen-Chu, que a melhor maneira de O amar é que uns nos outros nos amemos, e que amemos toda a Sua obra, mesmo o verme, e a rocha dura, e a raiz venenosa, e até esses vastos seres que não parecem necessitar o nosso amor, esses sóis, esses mundos, essas esparsas nebulosas, que, inicialmente fechadas, como nós, na mão de Deus, e feitas da nossa substância, nem decerto nos amam—nem talvez nos conhecem. (797-98)

Eça's Eden, then, is a space of learning and testing, a paradise of progress based on the imperative to survive, to do or die. In terms of narrative technique, the text is inconspicuous. It proceeds in an entirely linear fashion, and once the premise is established, the learning motifs are predictable. This rather slow, deterministic and linear progression is a necessary outcome of a decision to adhere to a scientific, evolutionary worldview. Like the rhythm of natural selection itself, the story unfolds in a gradual, stepwise fashion, a rhythm that could hardly be more different from the Brazilian author's retelling.

Machado's "Adão e Eva", like Eça's version, questions the conventional wisdom regarding the Edenic narrative. It casts doubt upon the notion of the "fall" as a descent into corruption and pain, and upon the culpability of Adam or Eve for this removal from grace. The tale is technically more virtuosic than Eça's—a frame story, set on a wealthy Bahian estate sometime during the eighteenth century. The owner, a woman, has invited a small group of friends for an evening's entertainment, and brings in an especially splendid dessert. One of the guests, a magistrate ("juiz de fora"), asks a lot of questions about the dish, and the hostess calls him "curioso". This leads to a conversation about Adam and Eve, about who was the more curious, and about whether "a responsabilidade da perda do paraíso devia caber a Eva ou a Adão" (Assis, 1985: 525). By placing the ques-

tion of responsibility or blame in the foreground, the story highlights an essential aspect of the conventional reception of Genesis. As we will see, Machado's story will problematize this notion. Each of the invited guests gives an opinion about who is more to blame, but when it is the magistrate's turn he states that it is useless to give an opinion, "porque as cousas no paraíso terrestre passaram-se de modo diferente do que está contado no primeiro livro do Pentateuco, que é apócrifo" (525). The small audience is astounded, and asks the magistrate to explain.

The interior narrative, then, is the magistrate's version of the creation story. In a Bakhtinian reading of the story, Anabella Acevedo Leal points out the inverted, degraded and carnivalesque aspect of the magistrate's version of the creation (1995: 9-10). The first notable difference, a shocking affront to the familiar, Biblical version, is that it was actually the Devil who created the world, with the permission and under the correcting supervision of God. The more positive aspects of the world are divine emendations:

[T]endo o Tinhoso criado as trevas, Deus criou a luz, e assim se fez o primeiro dia. No segundo dia, em que foram criadas as águas, nasceram as tempestades e os furacões; mas as brisas da tarde baixaram do pensamento divino. No terceiro dia foi feita a terra, e brotaram dela os vegetais, mas só os vegetais sem fruto nem flor, os espinhosos, as ervas que matam como a cicuta; Deus, porém, criou as árvores frutíferas e os vegetais que nutrem ou encantam. (Assis, 1985: 525-26)

Like the Portuguese story, the Brazilian one also defamiliarizes the conventional notion of a primordial utopia. While Eça simply fills his Paradise with every worldly danger, so as to make it an ideal space for learning, Machado seems interested in a more binary logic. The devil is allowed to create his poisons and pitfalls. Were this all

there was to the story, it would be easy to agree with Miguel Rettenmaier da Silva, who sees Machado's story in pessimistic terms, as the negation of salvation (2001: 7-8). However, Machado seems interested in a more binary logic, for in his story God creates delicious alternatives as editorial improvements. This cosmic vision composed of balanced opposites is the same one that Machado will famously offer in the novel *Dom Casmurro*, where life is an opera, in which the music has been composed by the devil and the libretto by God.

Once the earth is created, and Adam and Eve placed upon it, there is little to distinguish the magistrate's story from that of the Bible for quite some time. Satan appears in the form of a serpent to tempt the first parents with the forbidden fruit. He chooses to focus on Eve, and uses his best rhetoric to try to win her over:

Escuta-me, faze o que te digo, e serás legião, fundarás cidades, e chamar-te-ás Cleópatra, Dido, Semíramis; darás heróis do teu ventre, e serás Cornélia; ouvirás a voz do céu, e serás Débora; cantarás e serás Safo. E um dia, se Deus quiser descer à terra, escolherá as tuas entranhas, e chamar-te-ás Maria de Nazaré. (Assis, 1985: 527)

Where the magistrate's version is most estranged from the familiar narrative is in its climax. Instead of yielding to Satan's temptation, Adam and Eve remain faithful to God's injunction, refusing to partake of the fruit:

Eva escutava impassível; Adão chegou, ouviu-os e confirmou a resposta de Eva; nada valia a perda do paraíso, nem a ciência, nem o poder, nenhuma outra ilusão da terra. Dizendo isto, deram as mãos um ao outro, e deixaram a serpente, que saiu pressurosa para dar conta ao Tinhoso. (Assis, 1985: 528)

By eliminating the original sin, Machado's story radically problematizes the notion of culpability, which is such a prominent feature of the traditional understanding of Genesis. The text seems to call for the reader to consider the narrative in an entirely different light.

For their obedience, God gives Adam and Eve the glorious reward of departing directly into his celestial presence. The earth is abandoned, left to "o Tinhoso", to the "animais ferozes e maléficos, às plantas daninhas e peçonhentas, ao ar impuro, à vida dos pântanos", and Adam and Eve "subiram até a estância eterna, onde miríades de anjos os esperavam, cantando" (Assis, 1985: 528).

In typical fashion, the end of this interior narration takes us back to the exterior situation with which the story began. The text gives particular attention to that remarkable dessert, and to the confused reaction of the listeners:

(...) Tendo acabado de falar, o juiz-de-fora estendeu o prato a D. Leonor para que lhe desse mais doce, enquanto os outros convivas olhavam uns para os outros, embasbacados; em vez de explicação, ouviam uma narração enigmática, ou, pelo menos, sem sentido aparente. (Assis, 1985: 528)

The text never explains why the listeners are left "embasbacados"; this understanding is left to the cultural competence of the reader, and partly to the careful reading of the interior narrative. According to Biblical teachings, all humans are descendants of Adam and Eve. But if as the magistrate has said the first parents were removed from the earth for their obedience, directly elevated to their celestial reward and bypassing the terrestrial plane, where does that leave the human race? Where indeed does it leave the guests at the *soirée* in the story, not to mention us as readers? How can we all be alive and

on earth, when the unpopulated earth was supposed to have been turned over to ferocious animals and noxious plants?

The guests ask for an explanation. One suggests that the magistrate has been “logrando a gente” (528), or hoodwinking them. And here is the magistrate’s explanation, which constitutes the last paragraph of the story: “—Pensando bem, creio que nada disso aconteceu; mas também, D. Leonor, se tivesse acontecido, não estaríamos aqui saboreando este doce, que está, na verdade, uma cousa primorosa. É ainda aquela sua antiga doceira de Itapagipe?” (528).

It appears that the story’s narrator has, in fact, been “logrando a gente”. The magistrate is just one of many problematic narrators found in Machado de Assis, who engage in a version of the liar paradox. Essentially, the narrator tells us that he is a liar, leaving us as receptors in an impossible position, where we must believe him in order to disbelieve him, or vice versa (Dixon, 1988).

In the case of this story, we as readers are also left, to some degree, “embasbacados”, not just by the fact that according to that story, we should also not be existing on the earth, but because of a broader, more metaliterary logic: what is the point of telling a story, only to retract it in the end? Readers are left to resolve this question for themselves. This metaliterary dimension is one more aspect of the greater sophistication of Machado’s story of Adam and Eve. To a large degree, the story is about interpretation, or, if you will, reading. The characters of the external narrative, guests at the *soirée*, are curious listeners, engaged in an analysis of a time-honored text about curiosity itself. As each person offers an opinion, he or she is essentially providing a personal reading of the original, which itself is an object for the reading of the other guests. The story highlights the potentially problematic position of the narrator when it comes to interpretative interactions. That voice is not necessarily trustworthy, for as the story demonstrates, the narrator may be lying or engaging

in other forms of manipulation. Machado's short story might even be read as a programmatic statement about the author's general project in his more mature fiction, which consists in the creation of questionable narrators. When it comes to the audience, a programmatic representation is also implied. Readers confronted with such problematic narrators should not simply sit back and receive their tales in passive amusement. They should be engaged enough to become bothered or even confused by matters that seem illogical or confusing. As in the story, they should resist manipulative narrative posturing, suspecting the speaker of trying to "lograr". The story, which emphatically avoids that practice so evident in Eça's tale of stating a concluding theme, also suggests, in metaliterary terms, another programmatic matter which is to leave a large share of the meaning of the narrative in the hands of the reader, allowing her or him to work out its message implicitly rather than to receive it more passively through an explicit conclusion.

And what is that implicit final word for the short story? By indulging in the logical exercise of "what if" ("se tivesse acontecido"), Machado's story continues with the binary mode of thinking already mentioned. The story invites the reader to examine matters in terms of what is supposed to be, and also in terms of the opposite of that supposed reality. Implicitly, the tale is reminding us that if we feel the need to give Adam and Eve the blame for our fallen state, we should at least give them some credit as well, for without that original fall, we would not even be here.

The same binary logic is implicitly applied to the quality of our "fallen" earthly life. The story insists on life's sweetness. To follow the logic of the story's account of the creation, we are prodded into acknowledging that, yes, the earth has its noxious weeds, but it also has its sweet and pleasant fruits. Considering the story's insistence on the motif of that most delicious dessert, a plausible conclusion is

not terribly difficult to arrive at. Machado's story disturbs the conventional wisdom regarding the culpability of our first parents. Can they really be assigned blame, if life is, at least at times, such an enjoyable entertainment with such a delightful dessert? The story doesn't have the overtly didactic aspect that is quite apparent in Eça's ending. Rather, it offers a more oblique lesson. "Adão e Eva" seems to be suggesting that it is better not to dwell on the question of culpability, of giving responsibility to our first parents for introducing us into the "vale of tears" when, in fact, our existence is often characterized by pure sweetness, or at least the indulgence of ongoing temptations.

In spite of their common theme and parodic treatment, the stories by Eça and Machado are remarkable for their dissimilarities. If they were boxers, they would belong to opposite categories. Weighing in at twenty-two pages, Eça's would probably be a heavyweight, while Machado's, at four pages, would be a lightweight or a flyweight. Eça's tale feels like a reduced novel, which is understandable given that the author was above all a novelist, who only occasionally wrote short stories. Machado's story reveals a writer more comfortable with the conventions of brief narration. Eça's text is frontal and linear in its approach, relying on a solid conceptual footing and on the accumulated power of repeated and accurately placed detail. Machado's narrative depends on more dexterous footwork, and on a strategy of fakes and jabs. Rather than dominating through twelve rounds, the story seems to aim for a knockout in the second or third.

But I would say that, in its own way, each story is humorous, virtuosic and effective. Relying on one of our culture's most aged and familiar narratives, each achieves a significant defamiliarization of the honored original, causing readers to question their comfortable and untested assumptions.

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ABSTRACT

Both Eça de Queirós and Machado de Assis wrote stories about Adam and Eve, defamiliarizing in different ways the original Biblical narrative. Their deviations from the source are consistent with the general esthetic programs they established in their overall production. Through masterful detail, Eça creates a kind of Darwinian Garden of Eden, which continually tests the original parents, threatening their survival, and in the process facilitates their slow development into the capable human beings we recognize. Machado's story is neither romantic nor naturalistic, but rather a quirky philosophical and metaliterary entertainment that plays with narrative devices. A frame story, in which the narrator of the interior story ends up denying the validity of tale he has offered, creates an ungrounded narrator. The sense of confused giddiness produced in the narrator's audience suggests by implication an expected reader's reaction to the short story itself. In different ways, the Edenic narratives of the Portuguese and Brazilian masters disturb readers' comfortable assumptions regarding Adam and Eve, and encourage them to question this received wisdom.

Keywords: Machado de Assis; Eça de Queirós; Eden; parody; narrative technique; defamiliarization; short story

RESUMO

Tanto Eça de Queirós como Machado de Assis escreveram contos sobre Adão e Eva, desfamiliarizando de modos diferentes a narrativa bíblica original. Seus desvios dessa fonte são consistentes com os programas estéticos que os dois estabeleceram para sua produção como um todo. Por meio de detalhes bem escolhidos, Eça cria um tipo de Jardim de Éden darwiniano, que constantemente põe em prova os pais originais, ameaçando sua sobrevivência, e no processo facilitando seu lento desenvolvimento, até se tornarem os aptos seres humanos que conhecemos. O conto de Machado

não é nem romântico nem naturalista, mas sim um divertimento peculiar, filosófico e metaliterário, que joga com os recursos estabelecidos da arte de narrar. Um conto com relato intercalado, no qual o narrador do conto interior acaba negando a validade de sua anedota, e criando um enunciador sem fundamento. O sentido de vertigem confusa que se produz nos ouvintes daquele narrador implicitamente sugere a recepção antecipada do leitor do próprio conto. De maneiras diferentes, os relatos dos mestres de Portugal e do Brasil transtornam as suposições seguras dos leitores sobre Adão e Eva, incentivando um questionamento dessa sabedoria convencional.

Palavras-chave: Machado de Assis; Eça de Queirós; Éden; paródia; técnica narrativa; desfamiliarização; conto