

INCONGRUOUS EÇA: NOTES ON CAMP AND THE LITERARY PERFORMANCE OF THE MASQUERADE

EÇA INCONGRUENTE: NOTAS SOBRE *CAMP* E A PERFORMANCE LITERÁRIA DA MASCARADA

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One of the most climactic and certainly most memorable scenes of Eça's novel of incest *The Maias* is the crucial moment when Carlos da Maia finds out that his lover of the past few months Maria Eduarda is none other than his sister. João da Ega, Carlos's confident and closest of friends, leaves to the family procurator Vilaça the unpleasant task of breaking the grave news, and the reader enters the emotionally-charged scene through Ega's cowardly perspective when the deed is already done, symbolized by the fatidic revelatory papers scattered on Carlos's worktable. Vilaça's official business is complete and he stands to leave, "com a pressa de um galucho tímido que é rendido num posto arriscado" (Queirós, s.d.: 641). Yet he hesitates, and lingers as he glances around the room and peers under the table: the procurator has misplaced his hat.

The scene that develops is one of Eça's most ingeniously constructed passages that juxtaposes the mundane, dispensable and trivial search for a replaceable hat and the earth-shattering revelation of the incestuous affair. The procurator who, minutes earlier, had solemnly taken on such an unpleasant task, becomes a *persona non grata*, excusing himself only to return insistently minutes later: he still has not found his hat. In desperation, all three men search behind the

sofa, along the window ledge, on the bed and even in the washroom, but to no avail. Next, the unknowing butler Batista disturbs Ega and Carlos's heavy-hearted conversation, with the news that Vilaça has misplaced his hat, and finally, Afonso da Maia, the family patriarch, appears at the opening of the door-curtain, "encostado à bengala, sorrindo todo com alguma ideia que decerto o divertia. Era ainda o chapéu do Vilaça" (Queirós, s.d.: 643).

What can be made of this pivotal scene that reveals, as perceived from Ega's perspective, this "negra desgraça" (Queirós, s.d.: 638) when the dramatic aspect of the scene is diluted through a repeatedly disrupted narrative flow? The interjection of unwitting humor exasperates Carlos da Maia's agony in his desperation to understand this absurd imbroglio, a scene that Eça peppers with slightly "off" humor: a search for a misplaced hat that involves the watercloset. This double-layered scene poses a difficult task, to be taken seriously as perceived through the earnestness of the protagonists – whether they are searching for a hat or faced with a life-changing anagnorisis – and humorously through the incongruity of the juxtaposition. It asks readers more broadly to rethink these very categories of the trivial and the serious, and through the cartoon-worthy, perfect timing of these interruptions, creates a vertiginous moment that asserts the opposition between the absurd and the serious. This is the dialectical process of camp, "alive to a double-sense in which some things can be taken," as Susan Sontag writes (1966: 281). Camp humor, as is the subject at hand, results from an identification of a strong incongruity between an object, person, or situation and its context. The comic element is inherent in the formal properties of irony as apparent in the above scene. There is a basic contradiction or incongruity, coupled with a real or pretended innocence. For Babuscio, who places incongruity at the core of camp, "(...) in order for an incongruous contrast to be ironic it must, in addition to being comic, affect one as 'pain-

ful' – though not so painful as to neutralize the humor" (1993: 27). Oppositions of masculine/feminine (the most common camp association), youth/age, low/high status¹ are some of these structures of highly incongruous contrasts that inform this type of comedic effect, and challenge notions of deviance, social normality, and propriety. Camp manifests itself in a myriad of representational spaces, modes, and forms, from Art Nouveau to drag shows, a diversity that Susan Sontag's 1964 *Notes on Camp* illustrate in a catalog format along with eclectic observations, attempting to define the indefinable. This is an area in which all critics of camp coincide: camp is an elusive sensibility that has undergone constant redefinition. From the origin of the term (most probably French from the verb *camper* – to pose, to strike an attitude) that gave its broad usage to refer to a style that self-consciously favors exaggeration, artifice, knowing amusement and sophistication, to its acquired second meaning, often of cultish applications, of camp as a compensatory homosexual strategy that through humor reduces the established male/female categories to mere roles, exaggerated and consciously theatrical.

Literary camp for the most part has been left out of critical discussions, with the exception of references to Oscar Wilde, Walt Whitman, Marcel Proust and Ronald Firbank. For some, Wilde invented the concept, and while Sontag skims completely over literature in her camp manifesto, she dedicates her writing to Wilde, the ur-camp. My use of camp in this study, that originally stemmed from my reading of Eça's playfully modern, sophisticated and stylized text *A correspondência de Fradique Mendes*, led me to conceive a series of appreciations of camp in Eça's work more broadly, as much as a literary argument or a narrative strategy. As a form of mediation, a representation that conceals a secondary meaning, a literary game that sub-

1 See Babuscio, 1993: 20.

verts formal qualities of writing, the theatricalization of the narrator or character, the extravagance of style, tone or circumstance that is simply “too much” and entertains through its excessive playfulness, phrase, lines and expressions, that are exhibitionist and theatrically over-done, incongruities that pry open and upturn perceived social, class and gender norms, are all part of Eça’s literary style that when perceived through camp enable the reader to locate unexpected value in the text, an aesthetic that relies largely on arrangement, timing, tone and a dual perception. As such, camp corresponds to a subjective process or, as Thomas Hess phrased, “it exists in the smirk of the beholder” (1965: 53). It is a practice that, by definition, is not available to all readers or literary characters, and precisely for there to be a genuinely camp reading, there must be another hypothetical reader or diegetic character who views the object normally at face value. This position bestows a sense of superiority on those who, as accomplices of sorts, are able to interpret the artificiality of this performative aesthetic, to see through this literary disguise, and to appreciate the masquerade, even though, at times, that privilege is only bestowed upon the reader. Furthermore, there must be an element of coherence and consistency for a scene, character, or narrator to be convincingly camp. In the examples that follow, I aim to illustrate this camp aesthetic as a narrative strategy in Eça’s work that enables us to read these dialogues, scenes and situations as more than just pompous, stylized or over-the-top characterization: for there to be truly camp, there needs to be a code that is lost for a certain group, creating a double-level of understanding and reception of these excesses, figures of speech, circumstances, etc.

Eça throughout his writing artfully and skillfully incorporated terms such as an English or French word here or there, or a stylized dialogue that make certain passages more theatrical, small tokens of artifice that lift the context campily. Yet, in the examples that follow,

I will focus rather on scenes where camp is not just *effleuré* at the surface of the text, but embedded as a sensitivity in the context of the narrative, in the depictions of the literary characters and the situations described.

To be guided by camp entails understanding instances of being-as-playing-a-role, it is the farthest extension of the metaphor of life as theater that becomes several of Eça's literary creations in a constellation of minutely crafted, multi-faceted and fascinating characters, social wantabes, flawed writers, Charleton doctors and presumptuous mediocre poets, aiming to uphold respectability and correspond to broadly-conceived gendered, class, and societal presumptions. The Queiroso character that best denotes this over-the-top theatricalization is Counselor Acácio, in the novel *O primo Basílio*, who takes pretend social graces to the highest of levels, adding outlandish contrivance to the simplest of tasks. A case in point is his ritual of never going to the "chá de D. Luísa" without announcing to Jorge at the Ministry of Public Works the night before, with great gravity and doubled over in a bow, "amanhã lá irei pedir a sua boa esposa a minha chávina de chá" (Queirós, 1990: 39). Dramatic, a declared monarchist who sits up straighter in his chair if he mentions "the King", Acácio constantly quotes poetry – especially verses with nature-inspired metaphors with an uncanny repetition for "as neves da frente", avoids common words (preferring "restituir" rather than "vomitar"), uses Italian phrases to punctuate his grave pronouncements, speaks with authority on the most trivial of matters, in sum, as the narrator summarizes, "os seus gestos eram medidos, mesmo a tomar rapé" (Queirós, 1990: 41). An author himself, Acácio always refers to "o nosso Garrett" or "o nosso Herculano" metonymically emphasizing his desired proximity to the great canonical Portuguese writers. His social ineptitude is beautifully summed up in the deceiving subtitle of his Political Economy book, "Leituras do serão"

(Queirós, 1990: 41). Just as he is oblivious to Luísa's social cues as she attempts in vain to get rid of him on her way to "Paradise" to meet her lover Basílio, he pompously tells her all about his book that is no ordinary guide rather "um guia científico" on the cities of Portugal, indispensable reading for all urban tourism if one does not want to miss local curiosities (Queirós, 1990: 223). Acácio launches on an eulogy of Lisbon standing before the beautiful panorama as seen from the San Pedro de Alcântara viewpoint; law-abiding he restrains Luísa, heaven forbid, from picking a flower; and praises her religious zeal as she desperately returns from her "devoçãozinha" in the Church of the Martyrs having hoped to tire the Counselor, "a falta de religião era a causa de toda a imoralidade que grassava (...)", declares the unshakeable Acácio (Queirós, 1990: 227). This pronouncement bears great resemblance with the final scene of *O crime do Padre Amaro*, where Amaro's affair with Amélia caused indirectly both her death and that of their child. In a fortuitous encounter between Amaro and his friend Canon Dias in the Chiado at the center of Lisbon, they laugh that Amaro – in his words – now only confesses married women. Minutes later, they meet the high-class Conde of Ribamar who pompously reassures the priests that Portugal is the envy of other countries, "enquanto neste país houver sacerdotes respeitáveis como Vossas Senhorias, Portugal há-de manter com dignidade o seu lugar na Europa! Porque a fé, meus senhores, é a base da ordem!" (Queirós, 2000: 1033). Oblivious to the decadence, poverty, debauchery, backwardness of this setting, flanked by two dreary façades of the church, gloomy doors of taverns, in close proximity to a district of crime and prostitution, the Conde declares "Senão, vejam Vossas Senhorias isto! Que paz, que animação, que prosperidade!" (Queirós, 2000: 1033). All in the shadow of Camões's statue, symbol of glory and grandeur, while ending the novel on a frivolous, nonchalant spirit of light-heartedness that camp, as Kier-

nan discusses, celebrates through a sophisticated, amoral mode of laughter (1990: 16).

For Counselor Acácio, appearances are everything, similar to the claims Balzac makes in his 1830 essay “*Traité de la vie élégante*”, where he demonstrates a direct correlation between interior essence and exterior signification, or Oscar Wilde’s camp transgressive aesthetics, trading on the primacy of appearance in the dominant culture of respectability, insisting appearance and surface constitute the only value (Clark, 1993: 136). Driven by social recognition, during his promenade with Luísa, the counselor in an anxious movement takes off his hat, bowing profoundly, as a coach passes – claiming to an uninterested Luísa that the President of the Council had made a sign of recognition from within the vehicle (Queirós, 1990: 226). The ultimate “sign of recognition” comes in the form of his nomination to the rank of Knight Commander of the Order of Santiago, “*atendendo aos seus grandes merecimentos literários, às obras publicadas de reconhecida utilidade, e mais partes (...)*” (Queirós, 1990: 311). At the stag dinner he convenes to commemorate this the best day of his life, he dramatically reads in a booming voice to his captivated audience, positioning himself in the center of the room, holding the proofs in one hand, while with the other, fitting with his staged performativity, punctuates his text with stately gestures (Queirós, 1990: 313). Acácio’s pompous reading is blessedly interrupted by the timely announcement that the soup is on the table. As in this instance, food in Eça frequently plays into the narrative’s camp incongruity by disrupting the theatrics or lofty ideals of the protagonists. Similarly, a few moments later, Acácio, expounding about the great pleasure of spending hours in such illustrious company engaged in erudite conversation suddenly declares “*parecem excelentes os ovos*” (Queirós, 1990: 323), grounding the conversation back to primitive nutrition in stark contrast to lofty ideals and utopian thinking. Likewise, against

the setting of a copious dinner at the home of Abade da Cortegaça, in *O crime do Padre Amaro*, the pantagruelique background conflates carnal and sexual appetites. Cooking tips are said to overflow unrestrained into the Abade's Sunday sermons and private confessions, and even political metaphors, "cozinhar um deputadozinho" (Queirós, 2000: 311). As the priests lament the extreme poverty in the town they gorge themselves on duck and symbolically undo cassocks and lengthen their waistcoat buckles, in a spirit of excess and unencumbered merriment. As one of the priests extends his arms with "solenidade cómica" and calls another priest, Father Natário, a heretic, they swiftly move on to "arrozinho" and more Port wine (Queirós, 2000: 315). Similarly, Carlos da Maia, returning to Lisbon at the end of *Os Maias*, amidst the soul-searching balance of his tragic life, is more preoccupied by the plate of ham and peas he forgot to order for dinner.

Acácio deflects the insistence with which his dinner guests lament his celibacy by pondering the grave responsibilities of a head of a family towards God and society. As the evening winds down, the editor Savedra from the newspaper *O século* leads the rest of the guests in a toast to their host, with an equal degree of dramatization: "Conselheiro, é com o maior prazer que bebo, que todos bebemos, à saúde de um homem que — arremessando o braço, deu um puxão ao punho da camisa com eloquência —, pela sua respeitabilidade, a sua posição, os seus vastos conhecimentos, é um dos vultos deste país" (Queirós, 1990: 323). Acácio, modestly, responds with a stilted speech, excusing his lack of oratory skills as a mere zero in comparison to the capitol's illustrious parliamentarians, the consummate stylists, and unable to finish, toasts to the monarchy, all performed in brilliantly staged hyper-dramatization. For such a God-fearing, law-abiding citizen, it is ironic that Counselor Acácio is presented, in a brief statement from the beginning of the narrative, as living "amancebado com a

criada” (Queirós, 1990: 41), a fact that is later reinforced by the radical Julião who ventures into the Counselor’s bed chamber and, as he peers behind the curtains of the vast bed, “teve a consolação de verificar que havia sobre o travesseiro duas fronzinhas chegadas de um modo conjugal e terno!” (Queirós, 1990: 315). In this, the counselor’s theatricality, and his camp style in particular, serves as a buffer between the private erotic world and the public civic one. The counselor’s fakeness is likewise not lost on Savedra who, while commending his work verbally, really thinks of it on the same level as all contemporary works, “grandíssima cavalgadura!” (Queirós, 1990: 314). Conselheiro Acácio’s physical appearance further pries open the discrepancy between authenticity and make-believe: he dyes the few hairs that from the bases of his ears formed a little collar round his nape, and the darkness of the dye by contrast gave more lustre to his baldness – baldness that the narrator refers to, with sexual undertones, as Acácio’s one outstanding beauty, the contemplation of which made Dona Felicidade dizzy as if with strong liquor, he is her obsession, “a sua ambição e o seu vício!” (Queirós, 1990: 39). This infatuation is developed in the following section of the novel:

Sempre tivera o gosto perverso de certas mulheres pela calva dos homens, e aquele apetite insatisfeito inflamara-se com a idade. Quando se punha a olhar para a calva do conselheiro, larga, redonda, polida, brilhante às luzes, uma transpiração ansiosa humedecia-lhe as costas, os olhos dardejavam-lhe, tinha uma vontade absurda, ávida, de lhe deitar as mãos, palpá-la, sentir-lhe as formas, amassá-la, penetrar-se dela! (Queirós, 1990: 40).

To appreciate camp in the dramatization of Conselheiro Acácio is to perceive this notion of being versus role-playing, reality and appearance. Camp, as Babuscio writes, “by focusing on the outward

appearances of role, implies that roles (...) are superficial – a matter of style” (1998: 24). For Acácio, he plays his role well, consistently theatrical, posed, and exaggerated, for any available or imagined audience, indicating, as Ester Newton discusses in a different context, the fundamental characteristic of camp that opposes the “inner” or “real” self (the subjective self) and the “outer” (social) self (2002: 100-1). This resonates with William Lane Clark’s statement that the “ideology of respectability from the nineteenth century to the present is the true subject of camp. (...) [It] contains the deviant by relegating transgressive individuals and behaviors to a subject culture ‘Other’ than the homogeneous norm” (1993: 135). Camp provides access to the underside of these seemingly homogeneous norms and reveals the concealed motives, practices of dominant discourses with constructed qualities. By operating in an apparently humorous and often subtle manner, the camp sensitivity relativizes these contradictory notions and allows representation of marginal behaviors within the dominant discourse – the law. Or, in other words, camp aesthetics performs excess and exaggeration in order to make space within the realm of the visible for new, different, or repressed identities, through speech, mannerisms or physical appearance, yet there is always a glimpse of the underside, the true identity, for the aware reader, protagonist or viewer. In *O primo Basílio*, a novel that revolves around the adulterous affair between Luísa and the title character, Basílio’s blatant destruction of Luísa’s romantic ideal is cruelly expressed by his explicit rejection of life-as-theater, claiming his right to love with his heart without the gestures of an opera tenor: “Mas que queres tu? Queres que te ame como no teatro, em S. Carlos? (...) Queres que me atire de joelhos, que declame, que revire os olhos, que faça juras, outras tolices?” (Queirós, 1990: 213). The verbalization of Basílio’s position is barely surprising and hardly necessary, redundant almost, in the narrative, given his lack of concern for

her reputation or peace of mind and the description of the love nest for their encounters presumingly “o que se pôde arranjar” (Queirós, 1990: 188), with its foul odors of damp and drains, mildew, stain-covered mattress, coarse sheets of dubious whiteness in shameless disarray, matchstick marks on the wall above the head board, threadbare, mangy looking carpet with ink stains, all set to the disturbing background noise of a crying baby. As Luísa’s dreams of romance and embracing her lover “num silêncio poético” (Queirós, 1990: 187) are shattered, the encounter is further disturbed by the inopportune interruptions of the *patronne*, banging on the door to retrieve a blanket from the clothesline in view of the sudden rain. Camp advocates the dissolution of hard and inflexible moral rules yet this representation functions within the parameters of dominant laws and social mores. As evident in this scene of heart-wrenching disillusion, it pleads too for a morality of sympathy and through Luísa’s experience, the camp viewpoint suggests detachment from conventional standards as the reader is further guided by the narrative comparison of a nobly appareled yacht on course for a romantic voyage that ends up beached in the mud-banks of the Tejo: “e o mestre aventureiro que sonhava com os incensos e os almíscares das florestas aromáticas, imóvel sobre o seu tombadilho, tapa o nariz aos cheiros dos esgotos” (Queirós, 1990: 190).

Camp shares many of the qualities of what Mikhail Bakhtin has dubbed the carnivalesque, as David Bergman notes (1993: 99-102). Indeed in the English translation by Helene Iswolsky, one of the most common words to describe the “carnavalesque” is “gay”: “The entire world is seen in its droll aspect, in its gay relativity. (...) it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking and deriding” (Bakhtin, 1984: 11-12). Gay here being understood in its more traditional sense of lively, carefree or light-hearted. João da Ega in *Os Maias* is the character of Eça’s fictional universe that most stands out for his dressing

up for both everyday and special occasions. When he first appears in the narrative, Carlos's surprised gaze contemplates Ega's transformation from a bohemian student in Coimbra to his current appearance, "Era outro Ega, um Ega *dandy*, vistoso, paramentado, artificial e com pó de arroz" (Queirós, s.d.: 105), decisively camp. Along with his long, canary-colored gloves, cashmere spats, satin tie with an opal horseshoe-pin, the *pièce de résistance* was a sumptuous pelisse coat that he wore in the sweet, warm Portuguese autumn sunshine: "o Ega, o antigo boémio de batina esfarrapada, trazia uma peliça, uma sumptuosa peliça de príncipe russo, agasalho de trenó e de neve, ampla, longa, com alamares traspassados à Brandeburgo" (Queirós, s.d.: 105). The comic effect is even greater when Ega removes his coat and appears with nothing underneath, not even a waistcoat. To Carlos's amazement, Ega justifies the unusual getup: "Isto é para o efeito moral, para impressionar o indígena (...)" (Queirós, s.d.: 98). Divested of the pelisse, Ega continues to strut around Carlos's cabinet, with theatrical mannerisms and stylized speech, as the narrator tells us:

Desembaraçado da majestade que lhe dava a peliça, o antigo Ega reaparecia, perorando com os seus gestos aduncos de Mefistófeles em verve, lançando-se pela sala como se fosse voar ao vibrar as suas grandes frases, numa luta constante com o monóculo, que lhe caía do olho, que ele procurava pelo peito, pelos ombros, pelos rins, retorcendo-se, deslocando-se, como mordido por bichos. (Queirós, s.d.: 110)

When the clock strikes four, Ega suddenly takes leave of Carlos, wrapping himself in the pelisse, giving his moustaches a twirl and adjusting his expression in the looking-glass, departing "encouraçado nos seus alamares (...) com um arzinho de luxo e de aventura" (Queirós, s.d.: 110). This scene, with all its intricate details,

is essential to later understand Ega's thwarted costume ball appearance as Mephistopheles – foreshadowed by the narrator's description mentioned above. Kicked out of the Cohen's fancy-dress ball, Ega's melodramatic rendition of his humiliation reduces Carlos to silence:

Tudo aquilo começava a parecer-lhe pouco sério, pouco digno, as ameaças de pontapés do marido, os furores melodramáticos do Ega: – e mesmo não podia deixar de sorrir diante daquele Mefistófeles esgrouviado, espalhando pelo quarto o brilho escarlate do seu manto de veludo, e a falar furiosamente de honra e de morte, com sobrancelhas postiças, e escarcela de couro à cinta. (Queirós, s.d.: 271)

What makes the incident funny is its play of incongruities, the sublimely grand with the earthily ridiculous, the residues of his costume giving his anger “uma ferocidade teatral e cómica” (Queirós, s.d.: 270). On Ega's insistence they go see Craft to discuss his fate, and Carlos makes Ega get rid of at least part of the costume, the cloak and sword:

E assim arranjado, com as canelas vermelhas de diabo aparecendo sob o paletó, a gargantilha escarlate à Carlos IX emergindo da gola, a velha casqueta de viagem na nuca, o pobre Ega tinha o ar lamentável de um Satanás pelintra, agasalhado pela caridade de um *gentleman*, e usando-lhe o fato velho. (Queirós, s.d.: 273)

His tragedy is perceived as trivial, given his disassembled costume and discombobulated appearance.

Humor as a camp strategy is also a means of dealing with the representation of marginalized identities, the only process, as Moe Meyer writes, by which the queer is able to enter representation and to produce social visibility (1994: 11). This alternative mean-

ing of camp, as mentioned above, is a compensatory strategy that reduces the established male/female categories to mere roles. It is a complex mode that simultaneously tells and conceals, and thus through this doubling practice creates a means of dealing with a hostile or less-accepting environment as dictated by the norms of society. This corresponds to the “distribution of the sensible”, as coined by Jacques Rancière, i.e. the aesthetic configuration of the visual domain that “determines those who have a part in the community of citizens” (2006: 12). An essentially scopic regime – as was the case of Portugal of the nineteenth century – controls who is and who is not accepted in the social sphere, as well as how such representations function and circulate. This aesthetic – and in our case more specifically literary – dimension of the political, which Rancière unearthed, makes camp a powerful tool of adjusting the social visibility of certain groups playing on its ambiguity that mirrors the ambiguity of constructed gender. In *O crime do padre Amaro*, Amaro’s gendered trajectory flirts with representational ambiguity, from being dressed in girl clothes by the maids at the home of the Marquise de Alegros in his youth, foreshadowing, in naturalist mode, becoming a priest, viewed as sexually ambiguous, androgynous even. His sexual awakening in the country parish of Beira-Alta, Feirão with “uma grossa pastora” leaves his body quiet and satisfied, until he sets eyes on Amélia, to whom in one scene steeped in animal imagery, he goes silently, “com os dentes cerrados, soprando como um touro” (Queirós, 2000: 165; 691).

Yet the character that most visibly defies the moral and social order is Libaninho, an office clerk referred to as “o beato mais activo de Leiria” (Queirós, 2000: 193) who reappears constantly throughout the novel. Libaninho plays a key role in the plot development such as bearing the bad news concerning Amélia’s pending marriage to João Eduardo, designing the scheme consequently referred to as

the “proposta do Libaninho” (Queirós 2000: 665). Libaninho has no qualms pointing to a pregnant Amélia’s growing girth, and even appearing at one of the most inopportune moments of the narrative, stirring the scandal involving one of the clergymen of the parish. He performs his stylized effeminacy through the constant use of diminutives, including his own name, his high-pitched singing voice, joking and flirting with the older *beatas*, dragging up in Amélia’s dresses or S. Joaneira’s bonnets to make flirtatious advances on João Eduardo, to the delight of the women and João Eduardo’s mortification. In this Libaninho represents a constant reminder of this gendered ambiguity, showing from the beginning his infatuation with Amaro. Hearing that the priest is youthful, pious and has lovely white teeth, he can only answer “Coitadinho, coitadinho”, slobbering with tenderhearted devotion (Queirós, 2000: 195). After João Eduardo’s much exaggerated attack on Amaro, Libaninho praises the Lord that there wasn’t a trace of the blow on Amaro’s delicate and lovely white skin, “uma pelinha de arcanjo” (Queirós, 2000: 661). Obsessively making references to attending mass and encouraging his entourage of *beatas* to do the same, he is an active voice in denouncing sins against the church and dramatically overreacts to the priests’ talk about widespread sin by theatrically covering his ears: “Ai, o pecado que via pelo mundo! Até se me estão a eriçar os cabelos!” (Queirós, 2000: 307). A statement that is all the more comical when the reader recalls that Libaninho was previously described as having a “rosto gordinho cor de limão” and a “calva luzidia” (Queirós, 2000: 193). The conflation of Libaninho’s homosexual desires and ardent religious devotion, already present in his attraction to Amaro, reaches its climax towards the end of the narrative when Libaninho tells Amaro how he does a lot of virtuous acts among the soldiers – talking to them about Christ and pinning “bentinhos” under the sergeants’ vests (Queirós, 2000: 953). It comes then as no surprise that Libaninho is caught *en*

flagrant délit with a sergeant “de tal modo que não havia a duvidar... E às dez da noite, na Alameda!”, an anecdote that leaves Amaro and Canon Dias laughing, holding their sides at the scandal that was soon forgotten, and both men agreed, facetiously, that Libaninho would fulfill his newly-appointed position of sacristan “com zelo” (Queirós, 2000: 1025).

One of camp’s central notes is celebration: a shameless love of all that is exaggerated, a taste that by its nature is possible only in affluent societies or circles (Sontag, 1966: 289). Several key moments in Eça’s narratives translate with great humor this celebration of abundance, an excessive accumulation of objects, decorations, superficial signs or sensory overload that are simply “too much” as they combine the trivial, the ridiculous, and the comic. In the aforementioned novel, *O crime do padre Amaro*, the detailed description of Dona Maria da Assunção’s religious treasures, an excessive accumulation of images, statues, rosaries, baby Jesuses, bags of incense, blessed branches and exotic saints made in Alcobaça – layering kitsch upon the camp display – added up to such a wealth that was “a inveja das amigas, a edificação dos curiosos” (Queirós, 2000: 667). While an excessive collection itself would not be necessarily considered camp, the difference here is Dona Maria da Assunção’s *performative* investment in her collection, her constant concern with the placement of her saints and her conviction that the crowning jewel of her treasures, her reliquary, contained “uma lascazinha da verdadeira Cruz, um bocado quebrado do espinho da Coroa, um farrapinho do cueiro do Menino Jesus”, causing bitterness among the devout, and Dona Maria da Assunção, for fear of losing this “tesouro seráfico”, only showed it to her most intimate friends (Queirós, 2000: 667). In the euphoric words of Libaninho, “Ai, filha, é o Reininho dos Céus!”, a hyperbolic statement that endows her esteemed treasures with camp taste (Queirós, 2000: 667).

Equally felicitous as camp is the excessive accumulation of gadgets at No. 202 Champs Élysées, portrayed in the opening chapters of *A cidade e as serras*, where the main protagonist Jacinto, living amid “o tumulto da Civilização”, has accumulated all that high fin-de-siècle society has to offer, best emblemized by his carpeted lift between the only two floors of the apartment that offers “confortos numerosos, um divã, uma pele de urso, um roteiro das ruas de Paris, prateleiras gradeadas com charutos e livros” (Queirós, 1999: 24; 26). Here camp inserts itself impeccably into this explosion of urban culture that continued through the nineteenth century, “the increasing accumulation of men in cities” – as Wordsworth lamented in his preface to *Lyrical Ballads* – and the technological and sensorial overload that this accumulation entailed (1992: 64). Jacinto, “Príncipe da Grã-Ventura” (Queirós, 1999: 35), hosts a dinner party of high society guests with the presence of the Grand Duke who comes explicitly for the fish prepared according to his own recipe, only to have the food elevator jam halfway: “Em baixo, na treva, sobre uma larga prancha, o peixe precioso alvejava, deitado na travessa, ainda fume-gando, entre rodela de limão. (...) O aparelho enrijara numa inércia de bronze eterno” (Queirós, 1999: 66). Once again, it is not the mere accumulation of objects that creates what Andrew Ross refers to as the “camp effect” (2002: 312), but the theatricality that is embedded in the scene, having to “pescar o peixe!” (Queirós, 1999: 67). The party becomes literally an entertaining performance as the Grand Duke, thoroughly enjoying this unusual and novel comical suggestion, becomes once more “o príncipe amável, de magnífica polidez” and orchestrates the scene, “desejando que as senhoras se sentassem para assistir à pesca miraculosa!” (Queirós, 1999: 67). Despite this activity’s failed outcome and having to abandon the fish in the elevator, the evening cumulates with the Grand Duke declaring “fora mais divertido pescá-lo do que comê-lo!” (Queirós, 1999: 68).

A final example, and without doubt one of the most pertinent for this reading, is the semi-posthumous text *A correspondência de Fradique Mendes* that constitutes a fertile site for an analysis informed by camp theory. Focusing on the performativity and the masquerade imbedded in this text, the reader is able to access an intricate and subtle narrative form that toys with several registers, plays with the perceived focal point, conflates the trivial and the serious although never giving full reign to either scheme, and in the internal construct of the text defies realist conventions. In this re-invention of Fradique Mendes as a semi-heteronymic fictional character, the role of the narrator-biographer, the compilation of Fradique's letters, the conflation between both parts of the text, and the theatricalization of the narrator and its subject are imbued with artifice, the use of extreme mannerisms and mock-play that entertain through the text's flamboyant playfulness. In *A correspondência de Fradique Mendes* the different levels of theatrical posing and literary performativity within the text emulate and parody major literary genres and themes, such as Petrarchan love, the epistolary form, memorial writing, the short story, life-writing, the farce and the eclogue, in a literary style that varies from poetic, hyperbolic, epic, romantic to realist. Attempting to define and immortalize the title character and presumed author of the letters compiled as the second part of the text, through constant justifications, is the unnamed biographer-narrator's quest. This is the first level of the text's performative masquerade – the biographer-narrator's labeling their relationship an eight-year long “intimidade intelectual” (Queirós, 2014: 137). Yet, filtered through this narrative voice, the text gives innumerable examples of the narrator's utter infatuation: “Não sei se as mulheres o considerariam *belo*. Eu achei-o um varão magnífico – dominando sobretudo por uma graça clara que saía de toda a sua força máscula. (...) eu sentia naquele corpo a robustez tenra e ágil de um efebo, na infância do mundo grego”

(Queirós, 2014: 97-98). The biographer-narrator later concludes that Fradique is rightfully adored by women who perceive him as a rare man among mankind, “Fradique possuía esta superioridade inestimável, quase única na nossa geração – uma alma extremamente sensível, servida por um corpo extremamente forte” (Queirós, 2014: 170). Admittedly marveled by the novelty of the themes of Fradique Mendes’s poetry, the narrator, above all, is fascinated by the Form, the rare, unheard of beauty of the Form – in camp lingo, the love of style over content, that becomes in the narrator’s words his idolatry of the Form. The cult of Fradique’s Form and its prominence over substance transpire in all aspects of his existence, from the hyperbole of his letter writing, his green silk Chinese cabaia that marveled and intimidated the narrator, his concise perfection of dress that echoed that of his poetry (Queirós, 2014: 101; 97). “Postiço e teatral” is the impression Fradique left on the narrator’s friend Teixeira de Azevedo, and everything about him is stylized, the silver combs, silk shirts, his habit of smoking Persian Chibouks, and drinking champagne with soda-water, his home in a former Parisian palace where he installed himself with noble and parsimonious luxuries, he was, in Teixeira’s view, “um maquinismo de *pose* montado com tanto luxo!” (Queirós, 2014: 106). His genius left no literary legacy but his correspondence that the narrator refers to as “a espuma radiante e efêmera que fervia e transbordava, enquanto em baixo jazia o vinho rico e substancial que não foi nunca distribuído nem serviu às almas sedentas” (Queirós, 2014: 194). Yearning for a perfect form that did not exist, Fradique deemed it useless to write since only inelegant forms devoid of beauty could be produced. In prose he wanted “alguma coisa de cristalino, de aveludado, de ondeante, de marmóreo, que só por si, plasticamente, realizasse uma absoluta beleza – e que expressionalmente, como verbo, tudo pudesse traduzir desde os mais fugidios tons de luz até os mais subtis estados da alma (...)” (Queirós,

2014: 187). The letters compiled as “Correspondence” create a false sense of intimacy, maintained with a buoyant humor. The entire epistolary text is conducted in an elaborate style whose very excessiveness cues the reader to the passage’s campness. While in parts indeed seemingly superficial, the letters reveal to the alert reader an unspoken subtext that focuses on Fradique’s contradictory impulses, the pastoral happiness, and the scientific/urban versus the rustic/nostalgic. Fradique Mendes’s anachronistic taste in reference to Portugal in particular, but not exclusively, is peppered with humoresque examples that include, among the more colorful, duck with macaroni from the eighteenth century, indigest and divine meatballs from the time of the Discoveries, and fabulous stewed giblets that were King John IV’s preferred appetizer, in contrast to the reheated left-overs of the boulevard served with gelatine. In all of these examples, and many others, there is a coding that is self-consciously played with and where the apparent self-revelation is most conspicuous, despite Fradique’s desire to redefine contemporary taste through a selective refurbishing of styles in an attempt to resurrect earlier practices that have lost their power “to produce and dominate cultural meanings (...) in the present” (Ross, 2002: 312).

Drawing from these examples, chosen among other illustrations, how does a camp perception add to our understanding of Eça’s texts? Camp is, first and foremost, a literary strategy that as an art form, to paraphrase Oscar Wilde in his essay “The Critic as Artist: II”, can “shield [us] from the sordid perils of actual existence” (1945: 132). As such, camp’s role becomes a part of this artistic shield. The subtle and at times not-so-subtle uses of camp in Eça’s works enable the writer to remain squarely in the mainstream of contemporary fashion while expressing marginality, taboos and non-socially accepted behaviors. It enables us to laugh at what could cause discomfort through the combination of the trivial and the serious, deflecting from the weight

of gender, social or cultural politics. Yet this is not entirely an innocent literary device for, as Moe Meyer suggests, camp is a way of “entering alternative signifying codes into discourse by attaching them to existing structures of signification” (1994: 11) with the aim of shaking established power relations. In this, we are dealing with a “greater sense of the range of life and its possibilities, an awareness of the grotesque, of carnival, and of anger, sensuality and sexuality” (Kleinhans, 1994: 171). It is not a simple overturning of structures or an emancipation struggle, but the general broadening of imagination and experience. In the realist bourgeois novel – as is the case with the above texts – camp sensitivity exposes the boundaries of realist aesthetics: the propensity of literary camp for interweaving itself with the canonically approved genres seems a natural strategy for accommodating its special audacity. Keeping with the dictates of societal propriety, it is well known that Eça’s novels present a social critique steeped in satire, and camp, as a “solvent of morality [that] neutralizes moral indignation” (Sontag, 1966: 290), through humor, playfulness and theatricality, adds to the permissible transgressive quality of the narrative by neutralizing, containing and masking moral indignation. As such, there is more than meets the eye in the search for Vilaça’s lost hat.

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ABSTRACT

To read Eça's work through a camp lens focuses on the multi-faceted levels of textual interpretation that permeate the author's writing. Eça's form of camp playfulness is for the most part divested of its now oft political meaning that since the 1920s has been slanted to effeminate homosexual actions, in particular in theatrical and film argot. Rather, this study draws from this sensitivity in its more general and original application as it resonates in actions and gestures of exaggerated emphasis, excessive stylization, contrasts between negligible content and elaborate form, incongruous juxtapositions of style, aesthetics, class and circumstance, and comically speaking, the shamelessness that the camp masquerade affords in terms of an alternative to morally or socially correct laughter. Ultimately, this investigation hopes to open a discussion that considers camp *avant la lettre* a new point of contact for Eça's *fin de siècle* aesthetics alongside other writers of the time who likewise emphasize make-believe, literary masking and narrative misdirections similar to Eça's ingenious dialectical camp process.

Keywords: Eça de Queirós; camp; masquerade; stylization; queerness; humor

RESUMO

Ler a obra de Eça de Queirós através da teoria do *camp* evoca vários níveis de interpretação textual que permeiam os textos do autor. A forma como

Eça brinca com a sensibilidade do *camp* é, na maior parte das vezes, desprovida do sentido político que, desde os anos 20, tem incluído conotações efeminadas de vertente homossexual, sobretudo em referências ao teatro e ao cinema. Pelo contrário, este estudo parte de uma compreensão mais ampla desta sensibilidade, o sentido mais geral e original do *camp* e a forma como ressoa em ações e gestos exagerados, de uma estilização excessiva, no contraste entre um conteúdo menos significante e uma forma elaborada, justaposições incongruentes de estilo, estética, classe e circunstâncias, e, de uma forma cómica, a sem-vergonha com que a máscara do *camp* propõe uma alternativa ao riso moral e socialmente correto. Por último, esta investigação pretende abrir vias de discussão que possam considerar o *camp avant la lettre* um novo ponto de contacto entre a obra finissecular de Eça de Queirós e outros escritores da época que da mesma forma enfatizam o imaginário, as máscaras literárias, e os fingimentos narrativos, num processo semelhante ao engenhoso processo do diálogo *camp* queirosiano.

Palavras-chave: Eça de Queirós; *camp*; máscaras literárias; estilização; queer; humor