

MOCKERY AND PIETY IN MACHADO DE ASSIS AND EÇA DE QUEIRÓS

ESCÁRNIO E PIEDADE EM MACHADO DE ASSIS E EÇA DE QUEIRÓS

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The fictions of Machado de Assis often invent characters who grapple with the confusions and contradictions of a religion whose public rituals and personal pieties were hollowing out. His writings are not primarily anticlerical. They prefer to explore intimate dimensions of the changing moral institutions of the nineteenth century, including the narrowing social conditions for a Catholic conscience. Machado's writing on religious themes is consistent with his commitment to realism. In his novels, stories, and journalism—his newspaper columns, or *crônicas*, often embed fictionalized fables with made-up characters—Machado set up lifelike situations and invented plausible characters. His eccentric heroes and his caricatured minor characters seem recognizably “Brazilian”. Fantastic events in impossible worlds, such as a hippopotamus ride to the beginning of Time, are grounded in a delirium inspired in Brazilian social circumstances. Talking spiders who accuse one another of electoral fraud in their “Sereníssima República” sound remarkably similar to the chicanery around Brazilian elections (Assis, 1979b: 340–45). Machado loved to compose puzzles, and he even took the trouble to leave clues, by dating events in his stories, such that his apparently apolitical accounts of everyday life may be read as critical, allegorical commentaries on

specific Brazilian political impasses (Gledson, 2006). Machado's realism comprised not only politics and the way that interpersonal relations of "favor" were rooted in slavery and seigneurial land-holding power (Schwarz, 1990; Chalhoub, 2003), but also dimensions of religion and religious change.

When Machado comments on the religious sensibilities of his times, he often epitomizes them in mundane but striking details: a gesture, a phrase, an object that pops out of its context, defamiliarized and signifying. The detail may have been invented rather than observed, but its verisimilitude tends to validate its standing as a document. Among all the ways of explaining the role of details in realist narrative—as a conjuror's deception reinforcing "reality effects" (Barthes, 1986; Wood, 2008: 59-94); as a "defamiliarizing" or "making strange" of automatized conventions that is at the heart of all narrative (Shklovsky, 1990: 6-12); as the notation of an artist's super-rational experience of epiphanic revelation in an eavesdropped conversation (Joyce, 1963); or as fiction's analogue to the mode of knowledge based in conjecture from clues, a mode common to hunters, diviners, and psychoanalysts (Ginzburg, 1980)—Viktor Shklovsky seems to offer the best guide for how to read Machado, and how Machado presents the crisis of Catholic rituals, and Catholic doctrines and ideologies, in nineteenth-century Brazil. Machado encapsulates great wit in small, startling departures from our expectations. It may help to calibrate the weight of details in Machado's writing to compare his writing on Catholic consciences in everyday life—everyday pieties, hypocrisies, and impieties—to the much bolder and more emphatic style of his contemporary Eça de Queirós, the best writer in Portuguese of his times. Their local situations were not the same. Portuguese anticlericalism was much more vehement and central in politics than Brazilian anticlericalism (Neto, 2010; Borges, 2016). But Eça seems closer to Machado than most Brazilian writers; even a pointedly polemical,

anticlerical novel like Eça de Queirós's *O crime do Padre Amaro* (1878, 1880) combines blunt denunciation of the corruption of the organized Catholic Church with closely observed details of its impact at the parochial level and the level of personal consciences. The crescendos of comic effects in Eça's realism can help us to recognize the relative compression of Machado's dynamic range.

Because Machado de Assis deliberately and efficiently covered the tracks of his intellectual development and often veiled his personal opinions in ambiguity, it is hard to parse out the sequence of his personal religious disillusionment. In his twenties, as he was establishing himself as a journalist in advanced Liberal party circles, Machado took stands in defense of religious freedom, against frivolous Catholic festivities, against the venality of the clergy, and in favor of the humanity of Ernest Renan's debunking *Life of Jesus* (1863). He probably became an atheist, yet one who was equally skeptical of scientific dogmatism, was willing to accommodate to his wife's conventional Catholic observance, and was deeply aware of what his culture had lost by abandoning belief. His private opinions probably ebbed and flowed, just as his public writings cycled around deist or Jansenist opposition to the superfluous, worldly ritualism in traditional Catholic practice; deference to the Gospels, Psalms, and Ecclesiastes; life-long engagement with Pascal, Saint Augustine, and Dante on human depravity and sin; and preoccupation with conscience, sin, and the soul in a modern age of unbelief. With regard to Catholic practice, he never mentioned the Romanizing, ultramontane devotions that spread among the Brazilian upper class after 1870; in his later years he was sometimes nostalgic about the old "folkloric" Catholic festivities of Rio de Janeiro.¹

1 The range and ambivalence documented across Machado's career in Magalhães Júnior (1955: 337-60) is more plausible evidence of his private opinions than the consistently anti-

Many years later, Machado liked to return to memories of those years when he was in his twenties, in works such as the marvelous memoir, “O velho Senado” (1898), or in his column about Holy Week observations and the aging of Time during the Paraguayan War (Assis, 1894). One of those pieces, “Um dístico” (1886), has the testimonial texture of an authentic, reconstructed recollection and also the writerly quality of James Joyce’s notebook of observed epiphanies (Joyce, 1963). The narrator remembers an event twenty-two years earlier—and thus in 1864, around the time that Machado published his anticlerical open letter to the bishop of Rio de Janeiro. Walking down the street, he had seen an alms-collector in the habit of one of the religious brotherhoods, possibly collecting for the Souls in Purgatory—he can’t recall whether the habit was green or crimson. There are two recognitions. First, the narrator matches a face and identifies the pious alms-collector as the ticket-taker at the theater. The distich that comes to his mind is a famous couplet, “Le matin catholique et le soir idolâtre/Il dîne de l’église et soupe du théâtre”, on going to church by day, theater by night. Second, he glimpses something furtive down an alley. The man, who is accompanied by his son, takes money from the collection plate and slips it into his pocket while the boy keeps watch. It shocks the narrator that the theater’s dour ticket-taker is a cynical hypocrite and a thief. But most electric to the narrator is a third recognition: that life fits literature, that in the “ajuste de coisas”, things of this world trim themselves to the couplet (Assis, 1979b: 1064). Even in distant recollection, the narrator is embarrassed that his gaze exposed the alms-taker. He is a half-hearted *flâneur*. But he is unabashedly grateful that it showed him an intersection of life and poetry and

clerical positions he took during his politicized phase of the 1860s, such as his open letter to the archbishop of Rio de Janeiro, analyzed in Calheiros, 2005.

the link between two churches: by day, the church of God; by night, the theater, the church of Momus. A reader might reflect that the distich's conjunction levels downward, profaning. The narrator's voyeuristic fascination entails complicity with the alms-collector's crime. Giving charity to the souls becomes equivalent to buying a ticket to a play. Perhaps everything is role-playing, and theater is the stronger church.

If we examine Machado's mature work, from 1875 on, again and again he invented situations in which characters are pinched between the claims and demands of competing churches. His fable, "A igreja do diabo" (1884), in which the devil converts everyone to his church of sin, then finds that more than a few sinners slink away to commit virtues, is a game, a *jeu d'esprit*. But it is a serious game, one of Machado's many conceptual thought experiments about rival moralities and ontologies. In both *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas* (1880) and *Quincas Borba* (1890), Humanitism is the rival religion, and its prophet, Quincas Borba, comes to think he is Saint Augustine. Humanitism is a barely disguised parody of Auguste Comte's Religion of Humanity, which in 1881 established a temple in Rio de Janeiro. It has overtones of Schopenhauer's fatalism, Bentham's utilitarianism, and Spencer's social Darwinism mixed in, as worship of the *fait accompli*. Those who consciously live their lives by this religion sound insane and go mad. Not just Humanitism, but other dogmas of scientific rationalism compete with the Catholic Church for authority, and significantly, for the authority to declare one another insane. The late Ivan Teixeira argues that the seesawing of authority and confinements by the psychiatrist who takes over a town in Machado's novella, "O alienista" (1882), is an allegorical commentary on the then recent Question of the Bishops of 1872-1876, which had sent two bishops to jail for disobeying the government's orders to leave Masonic lodges alone (Teixeira, 2010).

Machado's topic was most often what had happened to the traditional Catholicism of his youth, the 1850s and 1860s, but he wrote during and, I suspect, he was writing about the cultural transition of the 1880s and 1890s in Rio de Janeiro. Catholicism faced competitive challengers and Catholics were losing their faith in what was becoming a mass city (Sevcenko, 1998). There was plausible verisimilitude to fictional situations like the rise of Humanism, because Machado's public knew about the proliferation of new religions in Rio de Janeiro. We can check his fictions against the journalist João do Rio's contemporary muckraking series of pieces on *As religiões no Rio* (1906). Just one example of fact checking may suffice. Ubiratan Machado (1983: 204) criticizes Machado de Assis's *Esau e Jacó* (1904) for anachronism. He points out that the Santos family's open and casual flirtation with an occultism similar to Kardecist Spiritism is implausible. Around 1870, when the opening of *Esau e Jacó* is set, this would have been furtive and scandalous, not a casual hobby, as it was by the time Machado was writing. Plácido's cult, which the banker Santos attends, is very reminiscent of Magnus Sondhal's esoteric cult of Fisiolatria, described by João do Rio (Assis, 1979a: 963-69, 1050-51).² Machado's aim was never documentary comprehensiveness. He rarely put a Protestant character or a Protestant church in his fiction, and he did not write about modern, ultramontane forms of Catholic lay devotion like the Apostolado da Oração (Apostleship of Prayer), with its emphasis on structured prayer and on taking the Eucharist, or on the modern forms of charity through Catholic social action, like the Societies of St. Vincent de Paul.³ But in much of his mature

2 cf. João do Rio, "As religiões no Rio: Os fisiolatrás".

3 See Borges (2016) for a survey of the Catholic innovations ignored by Machado. There are of course exceptions, such as Machado's defense of the rights of the Protestant Congregationalist proselytizer Robert Kalley (misidentified as "o metodista Kelley") in his *Diário do Rio*

fiction, characters live with at minimum a dual moral system, overlapping and contradictory codes of behavior (and forms of emotion). Their Catholic conscience is troubled.

Eça de Queirós may help to calibrate a reading of Machado's style and set a benchmark for the amplitude of his mockery of empty pieties. During most of their careers, Eça de Queirós and Machado were in wary dialogue with one another, each recognizing the other as the important voice in Portuguese literature. Although Machado would not have admitted it, surely Eça was the most interesting contemporary, both a model and an anti-model, when Machado was figuring out how to create fictional worlds that embedded episodes of Brazilians' spiritual muddle.⁴ In the 1870s, as Machado was beginning to find his style, Eça was ostentatiously anticlerical, much bolder than Machado de Assis. Eça's own religious commitment boomeranged from freethinking anticlericalism in the 1870s to embrace of a deist primitive Christianity in his later years, as we can see from the quasi-Tolstoian idyll in his posthumously published *A cidade e as serras* (1901) (Campos Matos, 2014). The marvelous range of Eça's late style includes, among other things, a deft touch with technological modernity that Machado never achieved; but the early Eça can show us more—by contrast—about how Machado compressed the representation of religious conscience into minute detail.

de Janeiro columns, "Ao acaso", November 22 and November 29, 1864 (Calheiros, 2005), and one noteworthy Protestant character, the English governess Mrs. Oswald in *A mão e a luva* (1874), who can quote the Bible.

4 Eça (1845-1900) was younger than Machado (1839-1908), but he matured very quickly as a novelist. Of course, by no means was Eça the only potential model: we know from Machado's review of Eça that he had probably read Emile Zola's *La faute de l'Abbé Mouret* (1875), and Machado often cited António Dinis da Cruz e Silva's mock-heroic poem about petty clerical politics, *O hissopo* (1786).

Eça bought into Zola's literary naturalism. Machado, in his 1878 review of *O primo Basílio* and the 1876 second version (first book edition) of *O crime do Padre Amaro*, countered by strongly objecting to naturalism's flattening reduction of characters' motivations (Franchetti, 2008). Possibly in response to Machado's criticism that *Padre Amaro's* town of Leiria lacked sanctions and antagonists that would make Amaro's panic at sexual scandal plausible, Eça rewrote the novel, introducing more critics of the clergy and augmenting the character of Doctor Gouveia, building in some of the tension that Machado saw lacking. Generally, characters in *O crime do Padre Amaro* are earthy and lively but flat and predictable, "types", as Eça himself pointed out in the preface to the 1880 third version (second book edition). Late in the novel, Doctor Gouveia and the truly Christian Abade Ferrão debate religion, each aiming by a different moral framework toward the good, and toward saving Amélia. Their good-natured polemic broadens the ideological range of the discourses in the book, and shows a good priest.

It is likely that Machado never read that revised, 1880 version of *O crime do Padre Amaro*, but surely he would have relished one of its most brilliant and sadistic twists, the lesson of Doctor Gouveia to João Eduardo, Padre Amaro's rival.⁵ João Eduardo, who has been unmasked as the author of an anonymous newspaper pasquinade about the town's priests and has thereby lost Amélia, appeals for help to Doctor Gouveia, the only independent, freethinking man in Lei-

5 Maria do Rosário da Cunha Duarte and Carlos Reis, at the conference on "Transatlantic Dialogues: Realism and Modernity in Eça de Queirós and Machado de Assis", Indiana University, October 23-24, 2015, confirmed that, given the publication dates, it is virtually impossible that Machado read the augmented and revised third version of *O crime do Padre Amaro* (1880) before writing *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas* (published in installments, from March to December 1880). In fact, it is possible that Machado never read the final version of the novel at all.

ria. But to his dismay, Doctor Gouveia refuses: “Vejo o que é. Tu e o padre—disse ele—quereis ambos a rapariga. Como ele é o mais esperto e o mais decidido, apanhou-a ele. É lei natural: o mais forte despoja, elimina o mais fraco; a fêmea e a presa pertencem-lhe” (Queirós, 1969: 250). The shock effect of these blunt Darwinian words, among the few spoken outside a rhetorical code of hypocritical Christian piety in the novel, is grimly humorous. Unlike the horrors of the novel, such as the murder of Amélia’s baby, there is no prefiguration. In the buildup to this encounter, readers have been lulled into identifying with João Eduardo’s boyish predicament and João Eduardo’s “liberal” point of view. We experience the shift in rhetorical register as a rebuke and a revelation.

Machado also indulged in broad-brushstroke dramatizations of the confusion of utilitarian and Christian values. The gleeful cynicism of Quincas Borba, in *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas*, produces extraordinary parallels with Doctor Gouveia’s speech. With insolent confidence, Quincas Borba proselytizes for Humanitism, defending war, slavery, exploitation, and cruelty as unfortunate for some individuals but good for the winners, for the species, for Humanity. First he appalls his interlocutors, then he converts them. Machado plays it for caricature, mining something very much like the effect of Gouveia’s inversion of conventional pieties. After he had explored Humanitism thoroughly in *Memórias póstumas* and in *Quincas Borba*, Machado found other ways to ridicule the bad faith of Catholics seduced by other creeds. He opens *Esau e Jacó* with a comical scenario mocking bourgeois credulity. Two sisters climb a hilltop slum’s dirt streets to the house of a famous fortuneteller, the *cabocla*. There they get treated both to a meaningless prediction of the twin boys’ fate (“*Coisas futuras!*”) and to a rude folk song about a servant girl dropping coconuts on the head of her mistress. The ladies return to a household where the husband may dabble in occultism, but all of

them honor the proprieties of a Catholic funeral mass for a deceased poor relative.

Yet for all Machado's mocking humor, he invented nothing quite as straightforwardly, outrageously contrived and sacrilegious as Eça's obscene climax to *A relíquia* (1887). Ne'er-do-well Teodorico has returned from the Holy Land with his pious aunt Maria do Patrocínio's gift, a phony relic, better than a splinter of the True Cross: a piece of the Crown of Thorns. He unwraps the package in front of her and her entourage of hypocritical priests and neighbors. Alas, packages had been switched by mistake. Out falls a perfumed, stained nightgown, the souvenir of his lover, Miss Mary. Teodorico is disinherited on the spot. "Deboche! Escárnio! Camisa de prostituta! Achincalho à senhora Dona Patrocínio! Profanação do oratório!" (Queirós, 1969: 251-53). Ironically, Teodorico had an authentic religious experience in Jerusalem, a vision of Jesus's entrance into Jerusalem and the Passion, an estheticized paraphrase of Renan's *Life of Jesus*. But his internal conversion is irrelevant; only the presentation of the relic had a chance of redeeming his past mischief in his aunt's eyes. This farcical climax is so magnetic that Eça returns to it, presenting a revised, alternate outcome as a sort of coda in *l'esprit d'escalier*. Teodorico, who has since lived (and learned) by selling counterfeit relics, transforming the value of objects, has had time to reflect on his mistake. He imagines that he might have had the presence of mind to say that he had found his aunt a relic better than the Crown of Thorns: the nightshirt of Saint Mary Magdalen! Surely he would have passed off the miracle and kept the inheritance: "me faltou esse descarado heroísmo de afirmar, que, batendo na terra com pé forte, ou palidamente elevando os olhos ao Céu—cria, através da universal ilusão, Ciências e Religiões" (Queirós, 1969: 441).

To see how Machado worked with narrative detail to deepen his exploration of Catholic conscience and religious emotions, we can

examine his reworking of literary material. Sometimes, like Eça, he expanded, augmented, and dramatized his material. In the opening episodes of *Esau e Jacó*, he returns to the topic of the alms-collector who pilfers alms. Distracted by the cabocla's pagan prophecy of the twins' glorious *coisas futuras*, their mother, Natividade, leaves a two mil-réis note in the alms-collector Nóbrega's plate. He pockets it. In "Um dístico", the tone of the narrator was reportorial, the glimpse of the hand palming a banknote a flash. In *Esau e Jacó*, the furtive act of theft from the souls in Purgatory becomes the premise for the narrator to indulge in a deductive series of speculations that are almost syllogisms. At the first the speculations merely reconstruct Nóbrega's imputations of motives, self-exculpations, and rationalizations for stealing the gift. Then the narrator imagines the incident as the origin point of a causal chain of moral acts of charity and love perverted by their expression through monetary values. The too-generous banknote from Natividade becomes anthropomorphized, an active banknote which engenders a magical cascade of other banknotes into Nóbrega's coffers, until the simple, selfish theft has—passing through the speculative bubble of the Encilhamento—metamorphosed into a capitalist fortune. Nóbrega re-emerges in the story as a Faust-like millionaire, the romantic rival of Natividade's sons. It is easy to read into the aggrandizement of Nóbrega (and the folk-tale motif of the great fortune founded upon a theft) an allegory of the secularization of Brazilian values from Empire to Republic and the rise of amoral capitalism (Faoro, 1988: 216; 240-42).

More often, Machado preferred to miniaturize his signifying details of defamiliarization and quietly leave them in plain sight. A key passage in *Dom Casmurro* (1900) also ends in an act of charity. Machado had previously worked out some of the novel's symbols, situations, and theme of corrupted boyhood in a short story, "O caso da vara" (1891). As he later would in the novel, he contrives

a dilemma around a boy, Damião, who has been placed in a seminary to be educated and ordained a celibate priest. One day Damião runs away, hoping to find freedom. He takes sanctuary in the house of his godfather's mistress, Dona Rita, who runs another sort of school, training slave girls in the trade of lace-making. Spurred by desperation into adult ingenuity, Damião cajoles Dona Rita into persuading his godfather to plead with his stern father. His head swells when things go well. Dona Rita champions his cause, and his godfather apparently mollifies his father. Damião trades glances with one slave girl, Lucrecia, the one who "tossia, mas para dentro, surdamente, a fim de não interromper a conversação" (Assis, 1979b: 579). But at the end of the day, he confronts a humiliating choice: either he hands Dona Rita the switch so that she can whip Lucrecia, who has failed to make her quota of lace, or he loses Dona Rita's sponsorship of his own freedom. The worldly manhood he can achieve is not gallant glory but abject complicity in the torture of a little girl, "agora presa de um acesso de tosse" (Assis, 1979b: 582). In *Dom Casmurro*, Bento has also been placed in the seminary by a parent's will; long ago, Dona Glória promised God to deliver her son to the church. By contrast with Damião, Bento's liberation from the seminary and from celibacy is first dramatized as an impasse, then apparently resolved in a painless anticlimax. Everyone in the family, including his mother, is relieved when Capitu figures out how she can be released from her solemn vow: Dona Glória will pay the tuition of a poor boy in the seminary, substituting her sacrifice of Bento as God let Abraham substitute a lamb for the sacrifice of Isaac.

But until the cheap trick on God is calculated, Dona Glória's promise looms large. It is the obstacle that will prevent Bento's love of Capitu. The long walk of José Dias and Bento through the Passeio Público and across the city, chapters XXIV to XXX, is an extraordinarily dense and complex scene. It is one of those passages

in Machado that, as José Luiz Passos says, transforms a protagonist like a Shakespearean monologue (2007: 110-13; 158-60). Bento and his tutor José Dias exchange roles, and change themselves, several times during the walk, as they conspire to get Bento out of the seminary and they try on alternative professions and educations. Law might be studied in Europe, medicine in Rio de Janeiro.⁶ Alongside them and around them, God grows and shrinks: from the stern God of the laws, to the God who can be bought off with prayers, to a generous God (who is nonetheless not quite omniscient). Emperor Pedro II passes in his carriage, almost as powerful as God. And then they join the accompaniment of the viaticum to take the Eucharist to someone dying, carrying God incarnate with them in triumph. When José Dias goes out bearing a pole of the canopy, it is “com o ar de ser ele próprio o Deus dos exércitos” (Assis, 1979a: 840), while next to them, Capitu’s father Pádua is humiliated that he let José Dias manipulate him into surrendering his pole to Bento. The dizzying leaps among scales of worldly (from the Emperor, to law, to medicine) and supernatural hierarchy sets the emotional tone of this part of the book, of Dom Casmurro’s reconstruction of Bento’s loss of innocence.

In this middle of this syncopated, kinetic flow through the city, an apparently minor detail carries a stunning weight:

6 Machado’s technique of rewriting by permutation shows here. In a first version of “O caso da vara”, *Gazeta de Notícias*, February 1, 1891, he had included a long dialogue between godfather João Carneiro and a priest, Padre B, in which they agree that the secular oratory of Cicero in the forum (the law) is second only to the sacred oratory Damiano will learn in the seminary. He suppressed this passage when revising a second version for publication in the volume *Páginas recolhidas* (1899), stripping the story down to a lean fable about slavery, freedom, and subjection. In *Dom Casmurro* (1900), he restored some of the sententious comparison between professions and the priestly vocation, putting most of it in the mouth of José Dias.

CAPÍTULO XXVII, AO PORTÃO

No portão do Passeio, um mendigo estendeu-nos a mão. José Dias passou adiante, mas eu pensei em Capitu e no seminário, tirei dois vinténs do bolso e dei-os ao mendigo. Este beijou a moeda; eu pedi-lhe que rogasse a Deus por mim, a fim de que eu pudesse satisfazer todos os meus desejos. –Sim, meu devoto! –Chamo-me Bento, acrescentei para esclarecê-lo. (Assis, 1979a: 837)

This punch line is as maliciously contrived as the unwrapping of Miss Mary's nightgown in *A relíquia*. Yet there is something about Bento casually informing the beggar of his name—absolutely gratuitous, because an omniscient God already knows who has given the alms—followed by the white space of the interval between chapters that accentuates a percussive illumination, an epiphany. This deadpan joke is like nothing else in nineteenth-century Latin American literature—a thrown-away punch line that slips by without commentary. Machado's prose moves at a velocity that permits sly, absurdist irony that others did not reach. And of course it offers a clue for the historian, a clue to the dilemmas of nineteenth-century Brazilian Catholics, bargaining with their devalued and near-sighted God.⁷ Perhaps the point is not only, as John Gledson has observed, that in *Dom Casmurro* God is reduced to financial metaphors, to being a Rothschild who always rolls over our debts (1991: 159-73), but also that God is so reduced from omnipotence and omniscience.

Machado never theorized the role of the detail in fiction, except to say that things should be subordinated to persons. The problem of

7 And there is a faint punning resonance (Bento/Bendita) between "Chamo-me Bento" – literally, "my name is Blessed" – and the inspired mutual recognition during the Visitation of Mary and Elizabeth in the Gospel of Luke, 1:42: "Bendita és tu entre as mulheres e bendito é o fruto do teu ventre"/"Blessed art thou among women".

Eça's naturalism, he said, was that it would give us "o número exato dos fios de que se compõe um lenço de cambraia ou um esfregão de cozinha" ("*O Cruzeiro*", 1878: 110). What matters is Othello's passion, not Desdemona's handkerchief. He would probably be bemused or frustrated at attempts to reduce his details to clues at historical shifts in conscience. But he wanted readers to move between imagined persons and living people. Roberto Schwarz (2012) has pointed out that one of Machado's *crônicas* reflects on the difference between those cases, persons, and events, which acquire a universal, allegorized meaning, and those which remain in the particular. This relationship between reality and fiction is expressed by Machado's narrator in "O punhal de Martinha": a girl in the Brazilian backlands threatens her rapist at knifepoint with words worthy of the Roman exemplar, Lucretia: "Não se aproxime, que eu lhe furo". Machado's narrator reflects, "Não quero mal às ficções, amo-as, acredito nelas, acho-as preferíveis às realidades; nem por isso deixo de filosofar sobre o destino das cousas tangíveis em comparação com as imaginárias" ("O punhal de Martinha", 1894, *apud* Schwarz, 2012). The excursions of Machado's and Eça's fictions into the interactions between reality and fictional worlds can enrich our understanding of Brazilians and Portuguese in the long process of Christian secularization. Machado in particular should be read not only as the premier analyst of the cruel emancipation of labor in nineteenth-century Brazil, but also as a great commentator on the displacement of the eye of God in the nineteenth century (Escalante, 2006; Taylor, 2007).

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ABSTRACT

The realist fictions of the Brazilian author Machado de Assis often explored religious themes through the presentation of keenly significant, minute details of everyday scenes and conversations. By contrast, the early novels of his contemporary Eça de Queirós demonstrate a preference for plotting broad dramatic climaxes. Machado and Eça coincide in exposing the unacknowledged secularization of Catholic consciences in Portugal and Brazil.

Keywords: Machado de Assis; Eça de Queirós; Brazil; Portugal; religion; anticlericalism; Catholicism; secularization; details

RESUMO

As ficções realistas do autor brasileiro Machado de Assis interrogam temas religiosos por meio da apresentação de detalhes miúdos das cenas e conversas quotidianas. Em contraste, os primeiros romances de seu contemporâneo Eça de Queirós manifestam uma preferência pela encenação de desenlaces dramáticos climáticos em grande escala. Machado e Eça coincidiram em revelar a pouco reconhecida secularização das consciências católicas em Portugal e no Brasil.

Palavras-chave: Machado de Assis; Eça de Queirós; Brasil; Portugal; religião; anticlericalismo; Catolicismo; secularização; detalhes