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# Silenced Histories: Slave Trade and Narration in Eça de Queiroz's "Singularidades de uma rapariga loira"

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**Abstract**: Eça de Queiroz's short story "Singularidades de uma rapariga loira" represents a breakthrough both in mode of narration and in subject. Distancing himself from idealizations of romantic love, Eça constructed a narrative that attempted to sustain his vision of modernization, colonialism, and their impact on affective life. To my knowledge, readings of "Singularidades" have so far entirely overlooked its allegory of Portugal's colonialism, and its silencing postures, especially regarding the slave trade. The past of Macário, the story's protagonist, in the South Atlantic is often dismissed; in my reading, it is an essential aspect of the story's innovation. Paying attention to Macário's past also allows one to uncover Eça de Queiroz's layered storytelling style and opinions on colonialism.

**Keywords**: Postcolonial studies, colonialism, unreliable narrator, Portuguese nineteenth-century history, transatlantic slave trade

> *… em q' convem por isso mesmo guardar mais silencio do q' falar*
> *Analyse sobre a justiça do Resgaste ou Commercio dos escravos da Costa de Africa* of Antonio Ribeiro Santos in 1806[1]

[1] "… [things] in which it is better to keep quiet than speak"; my translation. This quotation is found in Bastos, p. 297. Santos understood, early in the nineteenth century, that the best solution is not to say anything about the slave trade, especially because "se defende mal, e q' peior fica, quanto mais se quer defender" ("the more poorly one defends it, the worse it gets, and the more one wants to defend it").

After all, what did Macário go to do in Cape Verde?

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Ricardo Piglia has suggested that "a short story always tells two stories" (63). The first story is the evident one, tangible, visible; the second is the secret story, which has yet to be discovered. This thesis has the virtue of laying bare an unformulated assumption underlying most, if not all, literary readings. To Piglia, the rupture between the classic and the modern short story was determined precisely by how the author dealt with these two levels of storytelling. In the classical story, the secret story is presented in fragmentary view, its full revelation leading readers to the surprising twist at the end. The modern story foregoes surprise and might even make the secret story more apparent than the first or evident story.

José Maria Eça de Queiroz's "Singularidades de uma rapariga loira" (1873) might be read as offering a controversial take on Piglia's famous theoretical assertion. On the one hand, the first story is divided into several layers of narration: it is a story within a story within a story. But it is not hard to discern its plotline: in the middle of the nineteenth century, Macário, a man, meets a stranger in a guest house. He then recounts how he fell madly in love with a young blonde girl, Luísa, who was despised by his uncle. The disagreement between them made Macário abandon his family business and work in Cape Verde, until he could come back with enough money to sustain life with his beloved Luísa. Shopping for their wedding ring, he realizes what his uncle knew from the beginning: the girl is a thief—perhaps, in modern terms, a kleptomaniac. Macário's desire dissipates, and he dissolves his relationship immediately.

On the other hand, there is a possible secret story in "Singularidades" about which very little has ever been said: it is not only a tale of ill-fated love, but also an allegory of Portuguese colonialism and its ties to the transatlantic slave trade. Mácario goes to Cape Verde to work as an enslaver. The (hidden) subversive aspect of Eça de Queiroz's allegory is the way its very hiddenness mimics political practices of passing over slavery in silence, and thereby shows how ingrained it was in Portuguese society. Macário, read in these terms, is a worse thief than Luísa. Not content with robbing small objects and coins, he has instead seized the very lives of many people.

The secret story inside "Singularidades," therefore, is one of the biggest open secrets of Portuguese society. Debates over the slave trade were actively silenced during the nineteenth century, especially when the narration of the story takes place (1823–1833 and 1872). Eça's approach to it both mimics the silence of modern Portuguese society and criticizes its hypocrisies: Macário cannot stand his kleptomaniac fiancée, but his own livelihood comes from being a slave trader. Narratively speaking, this phenomenon produces a twist: Eça's short story is not as surprising as the modern reader might expect it to be. That lack of surprise is as if hidden in plain sight. In fact, maybe the story is more modern than one would expect precisely because the true twist—the denial of Mácario's ties to colonialism—while "obvious," is also never made explicit.

Despite all of Macário's clear connections to colonialism and violence, the narration establishes that after his time in Cape Verde, he has proven to be an "homem de bem,"[2] a moral judgment that should be put into question. To uncover this sphere of colonialism, we ought to hear the sounds of Portuguese silence, to use João Pedro Marques's metaphor. "Singularidades," then, marks not only the end of Portuguese romanticism, but also the beginning of Eça de Queiroz's naturalism, thereafter associated with a fine analysis of the colonial enterprise in Portugal and its relationship to desire. It is therefore necessary to read Eça de Queiroz's oeuvre in its overseas dimension, and in a cultural and historical way; in other words, one must wonder what Macário did when in Cape Verde.

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Although few canonical Portuguese authors have been the subject of more studies than Eça de Queiroz, it was not until very recently that his literary work was connected to issues of colonialism. This is particularly striking, especially given how much Eça's work outside of his fiction—be it his diplomatic writings or his journalism—dealt with the topic. While some allusions to the colonial question were made by João Medina in the 1970s—in work that coincided with the Portuguese Revolution—the question took its academic shape only in the last decade. The work of Pedro Schacht Pereira has effectively drawn a relationship between an orientalist sublime and the Portuguese colonial identity in the works of

[2] "O senhor [Macário] é um homem de bem. Estúpido, mas homem de bem" ("the Mister is a good man. Stupid, but a good man").

Eça. Recently José Carlos Vanzelli has stressed how Eça's early journalistic writing already presented opinions about colonialism that would persist throughout his later works. The interesting aspect to stress in Eça's fiction, however, is how much ambiguity it preserves, especially compared to the ironic tone of his journalism. While in the newspaper the humor with which Eça braved proposing the sale of all colonies given their financial costs is pragmatic (Eça de Queiroz and Ramalho Ortigão 70–71), the fiction moves to an entirely different level, revealing the emotional effects of colonialism. Once desire enters the picture, it is no longer a question of local meaning or tone; at play is the fundamental question of the degree to which colonialism shapes the internal desires of the Portuguese mentality.

A postcolonial approach to Eça's writing reveals not only underremarked aspects of his politics, but also crucial dimensions of his innovations in storytelling. A reading attentive to social and historical factors discloses how the *dispositif* of retroactive narration allows "Singularidades"—and *Os Maias*, too—to give an account of history shaped as much by its omissions as by what is explicitly present. It is hard to establish a schematic rendering of Eça's views on colonialism after reading "Singularidades"; as Maria Helena Santana has stressed, at the end of the short story, readers are unsure whether they have read a farce or a melodrama. For Santana, much depends on the ill-fated end of the couple; to my mind, this generic uncertainty extends beyond the end. If now we know what Macário did in Cape Verde, we must wonder whether Macário ever realized the nature of his own desire, and the degree to which his rejection of Luísa revealed his colonial hypocrisy.

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"Singularidades" devotes very little time to explaining precisely what kind of activities Macário undertook in Cape Verde. Indeed, for a *not-so-short* short story, the two paragraphs that depict the travel to Africa are particularly enigmatic:

> Conheceu as viagens trabalhosas nos mares inimigos, o enjoo monótono num beliche abafado, os duros sóis das colónias, a brutalidade tirânica dos fazendeiros ricos, o peso das fardas humilhantes, as dilacerações da ausência, as viagens no interior de

> terras negras, e a melancolia das caravanas que costeiam por violentas noites, durante dias e dias os rios tranquilos, donde se exala a morte.
> Voltou. (186)

Although short, this fragment gives us enough information to speculate on what kind of activities occupied Macário in Cape Verde.

At first glance, one is struck by the discrepancy between the depicted region and the country that nowadays we understand as Cape Verde. The African coast islands are famously known for their water problems; therefore, "rivers redolent of death" becomes particularly inconsistent if employed to describe a journey to Cape Verde. Indeed, there are no permanent rivers on the islands.[3] Moreover, the islands are famously small, making the idea of travels to the interior of "dark lands" also unlikely. It is evident that the idea of Cape Verde in the nineteenth century meant a place significantly broader than one might expect.

It is my intention, nevertheless, to stress that "going to Cape Verde" might imply that one is undertaking a very specific kind of activity, that is, slave trading. The fact readers of the short story—unlike in later works of Eça de Queiroz—are not explicitly informed of the activity might be explained by the implicit reference to an activity at once evidently intrinsic to Portuguese society and officially consigned to silence by government officials. In fact, analyzing *O primo Basílio*, literary scholar Paulo Motta Oliveira stressed the impossibility, in the world of Eça's fiction, of behaving morally while amassing a fortune outside of Europe. The tropics "são espaços em que a fortuna é encontrada, sobre os quais apenas temos histórias retrospectivas e duvidosas" (Oliveira 369). Much of my reading of "Singularidades" would affirm such a conclusion. Olivera has even stressed the degree to which Basílio could have been involved in slavery, coming to his conclusions through a comparative analysis of Eça de Queiroz's novel and Balzac's *Eugenie Grandet*; he notes that even Franco Moretti (apud Oliveira), not particularly known as a postcolonialist scholar, stressed the noticeable omission in many major European novels of explanations of what their characters did overseas.

[3] There are some perennial rivers in the rainy season, but even nowadays, water provision in Cape Verde is provided by wells. https://pubs.usgs.gov/fs/2010/3069/pdf/fs20103069Port.pdf and http://www.caboverde-info.com/Identidade/Meio-ambiente/Hidrografia/As-bacias-e-a-rede-hidrografica-de-Cabo-Verde, visualized in 06.III.2020.

A historiographical approach to the issue of silencing can help to recover what might be hidden in such omissions of reference, and thereby to understand the making of a Portuguese—or, perhaps, European—morality during colonialism. For Eça, the latter project conjugated a formulation of national morality with sexual desire.

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"Singularidades" has at least three narrative layers.[4] The first is that of the narrator/author, an unidentified man who considers himself to be "naturalmente positivo e realista" (168), even though he indulges in mysticism when passing by a cemetery. The second is the narrative of this narrator/author's encounter with Macário, our protagonist. This meeting takes place in a guest house in Minho, in the north of Portugal. The dates are not explicit, but it is suggested that Macário is an older man then, so quite likely this occurs around the time of the short story's publication, 1873. Then there is Macário's narration of his disillusionment in love sometime between the 1820s and 1830s (certainly after the loss of Brazil, since the author says "1823 ou 1833";170), in which he reports having fallen in love with a blonde girl named Luísa, and having had all his passions fall apart when he discovered that she was a thief.

The two time periods that the short story deals with the most—the 1870s and 1823–1833— are quintessential moments in the history of the Portuguese slave trade, both marking shifts in the forms in which Portugal participated in this infamous commercial practice. According to João Pedro Marques, the history of the Portuguese transatlantic slave trade can be divided into three main periods: from before the Napoleonic invasions of the Iberian Peninsula (1808) to the Vienna Congress (1814–1815); the era after Brazilian emancipation in 1822, defined by the politics of silencing any reference to affairs connected with the slave trade in the South Atlantic (1822–1837); and the effective end of the transatlantic slave trade with the military interventions of the United States preventing the arrival of illegal Portuguese ships in Cuba in 1868. These historical levels correspond, more

[4] Literary studies, in its most orthodox forms, has done great work in elucidating the complexity of these layers. My work is more closely connected to history and cultural studies, but it would not be possible without the accounts of the narration given by Gonçalves and Monteiro (39–57) and Coelho da Silva and Miguel (passim).

or less, to those of "Singularidades": Macário's narrative takes place roughly between 1825 and 1835, therefore during the turmoil of new reflections on South Atlantic slave trade; the encounter between Macário and the narrator, and the publication of the story, take place in the 1870s, and so coincide with a new (and final) crisis of the transatlantic slave trade.

At the end of the Vienna Congress, Portugal obtained extraordinary permission to continue human trafficking under the equatorial line (Marques 101). That permission was legally bound by the fact that both sides of the South Atlantic were colonies of Portugal at the time, and the Portuguese royalty was in Rio de Janeiro.[5] Therefore, even with the intensive campaign against the transatlantic slave trade—mostly headed by British political movements—the slave trade was still legal for Portuguese dealers. Given their precarious legality, when Brazil achieved its political emancipation in 1822, a new crisis emerged. On the one hand, the legal claim to preserve the slave trade had come to an end. On the other, Portuguese who resided in Brazil—and, even in Lusophone Africa, I dare say—were still connected to the slave trade, and were unwilling to lose their business. They often hosted their business in Lisbon, under the flagship of fabric traders (Capela), the same profession that the Macário family practiced for generations in "Singularidades." The association between the slave trade and the Portuguese in Brazil—and overseas—was so evident at that time that the British council in Rio de Janeiro wrote at the end of the 1820s, without parsimony, that "there are 30,000 Portuguese in Rio, all it may be said slave dealers" (Cf. Eltis 150).

The crisis of the slave trade began in 1822 and intensified until 1827, when the proclamation of an anti-slave-trade law established that all transatlantic slave trade in the South Atlantic would come to an end in 1831. In fact, this abolition did not happen (it was "para inglês ver"), and Brazil received a great portion of its enslaved population precisely during the first half of the nineteenth century (Fragoso).

[5] This chapter of history might be redundant to those familiar with Iberian nineteenth-century history; however, it is still an incredible story. With the advent of the Napoleonic invasions, D. John VI, by then the regent-prince, was forced to leave Lisbon with all his court, and moved Portugal's capital to Rio de Janeiro. This decision implied that Rio de Janeiro, and Brazil, immediately stopped being a colony, to become instead part of the Portuguese kingdom's metropolis. Therefore, Portugal became the only European nation until then to have a capital on the American continent. This situation persisted until 1821, when Portugal became a constitutional monarchy. Nevertheless, Brazilian emancipation meant that the country would be an empire—not a republic—so the Brazilian monarch, D. Peter I, was also the heir of the Portuguese throne. Indeed, he became Portuguese king in 1831, but he could not preserve both crowns, and was forced to abdicate the Brazilian throne in favor of his son.

However, the reasons why this law was not effectively enforced also informed the practice of remaining silent about the slave trade in the Portuguese language, or confining it to innuendo. According to historian Tâmis Parron, slave traders actually thought that their commerce would be seized in 1831, so they attempted to traffic as many enslaved people as they could before then. However, that also meant that they obtained better knowledge of the South Atlantic than British ships, allowing them to proceed with the practice illegally longer than they ever expected—until 1850 in the case of Brazil, and 1868 in Cuba, which was not included in the original proclamation because it is above the equatorial line.

The silence surrounding the matter, which was codified especially during the Napoleonic invasions, and sedimented as an Iberian practice during the 1820s and 1830s—the period during which Macário was in Cape Verde—also had a political purpose. According to historians Márcia Berbel and Rafael Marquese, Iberian countries, when facing their first parliamentary experiences, avoided debating affairs related to the slave trade and slavery because they feared that an experience similar to that of Haiti could happen in their colonies, that is, Cuba and Brazil. It was their understanding that the Haitian revolution was mostly fomented by the publishing in the colonies of constitutional debates in Paris. Thus, Iberian nations, and later Brazil, progressively avoided having any political debates about the slave trade published in the press.

It seems plausible that this silencing practice was present not only in the parliament, but in Portuguese people's everyday life. Eça de Queiroz, then, was capable not only of making a compelling representation of it, but also of building a subjective critique of the colonizer's morality. There is even a resemblance between Eça's language and that of Lisbon commerce houses'—that is, slave traders'—pamphlets. When Eça wrote that the Macários were "[uma] antiga família, quase uma dinastia de comerciantes, que mantinham com uma severidade religiosa a sua velha tradição de honra e de escrúpulo" (170),[6] one might see there a mimicry and mockery of language employed in the overseas commercial houses.[7] Moreover, it is interesting that Eça used the term "homem de bem" to describe both Macário—arguably, a slave trader—and Monforte, in his major novel *Os*

[6] "a very old family, a kind of dynasty of merchants, who kept up their old traditions of honesty and scrupulousness with almost religious severity" (90).
[7] Good examples of these pamphlets can be found in Capela and in Jerónimo, *Diplomacia* .

*Maias* (1888).[8] Monforte is indisputably a slave trader. It is also feasible to read most of the novel's conundrum as a deed of Monforte's commercial activities: from the social stigma surrounding Maria Monforte to the family separation and the eventual incest.

Still on the matter of historical moments, it is imperative to stress how linked Eça de Queiroz himself was to problems related to human trafficking at the time that he wrote "Singularidades." As stated above, the last Portuguese ship carrying enslaved people arrived in Cuba in 1868. Although the practice had ended on the Brazilian coast, Portuguese dealers were profiting from the *odioso comércio* elsewhere. Eça de Queiroz was not only an author, but also a lifelong diplomat, and he was appointed to work as consul in Cuba in 1872. Although his political opinions might not have been the same as those of Eça the literary writer, it is interesting that he wrote a pamphlet on the affairs of Chinese emigration to Cuba at the time. According to José I. Suárez, Eça purportedly defended the eradication of camps for Chinese laborers in Cuba. Their working conditions were, in Eça's view, worse than those of black slaves. It is interesting to note that it was likewise Portuguese traders who brought these Chinese workers, even though, in China, little was known of the working conditions they would soon face. It is a pity that Suárez echoes Maria Filomena Mónica's thesis that "Singularidades de uma rapariga loura" "mirrors nothing of [Eça's] Cuban experience" (Mónica 105-106). I argue that, if we pay enough attention to the historical context of slave trading and colonialism in the early 1870s—a pressing issue in Cuba at the time—"Singularidades" is linked to Eça's Caribbean residence. Moreover, such historical contextualization is essential to a better political and aesthetic appreciation of Eça's works.

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Eça de Queiroz's writing is famous for its rupture with earlier traditions of romantic love, undoing it for the sake of naturalistic prose. Santana has stressed how little physical and emotional contact there is between Luísa and Macário for

[8] "[Monforte] Escapara aos cruzeiros ingleses, arrancara uma fortuna da pele do africano, e agora rico, homem de bem, proprietário, ia ouvir a Corelli a S. Carlos" ("[Monforte] escaped the British ships, took a fortune out of African skins, and now, as a wealthy man, good man, owner, goes to San Carlos [the opera house in Lisbon] to listen to Corelli" [26; my translation]).

most of the story;. Eça himself claimed that love became a minor issue in modern society:

> Os Romeus, as Julietas (para citar só este casal clássico) já não se repetem nem são quase possíveis nas nossas democracias, saturadas de cultura, torturadas pela ânsia do bem-estar, cépticas, portanto egoístas, e movidas pelo vapor e pela eletricidade.
> Ora quando uma arte teima em exprimir unicamente um sentimento [o amor] que se tornou secundário nas preocupações do homem—e a própria se torna secundária, pouco atendida, e perde pouco a pouco a simpatia das inteligências. Por isso hoje, tão tenazmente os editores se recusam a editar, e os leitores se recusam a ler, versos em que só se cante de amor e de rosas.… A glória de Zola vem sobretudo da universalidade e modernidade dos seus assuntos, —a terra, o dinheiro, o comércio, a política, a guerra, a religião, as grandes indústrias, e a ciência—que são os factos que interessam o homem culto. (Eça de Queiroz apud Santana 94)[9]

For Santana, Eça de Queiroz's ill-fated loves serve to transfer the action away from the question of romantic love to issues of modern life. The affective lives of his characters are presuppositions, as it were, that allow him to debate affairs of Portuguese modernity, a modernity that, as Eça himself pointed out, made romantic love uninteresting even for his readers.

If love itself is not the subject, it is essential to uncover how this modern sensibility interacted with Eça's representation of desire—or, more precisely, of

[9] My translation: "the Romeos and Juliets (just to quote this classical pair) do not repeat anymore and are almost impossible in our democracies, saturated of culture, tortured by the nausea of well-beingness, skeptical, and therefore egoists, and moved by vapor and electricity.
"Therefore, when an art insists on expressing uniquely one sentiment [love] that became secondary in man's concerns—the art itself becomes secondary, little heeded, and loses step by step the sympathy of intelligence. Because of that today, very harshly, editors refuse to publish, and readers refuse to read verses, in which love and roses, solely, are sung.… Zola's glory comes, above all, from its universality and the modernity of its affairs—earth, money, commerce, politics, war, religion, great industries, science—that are facts that interest cultured men."
The full text was originally published in the *Gazeta de Notícias* in Rio de Janeiro under the title "temas para versos" (topics for verses). It was transcribed fully by Piwnick in her critical edition of Eça de Queiroz.

disrupted desire. Eça addressed and readdressed this topic continuously throughout his career, but in "Singularidades" the cards are already on the table: it is important to see how the unfolding of colonial desire is blended with sexual desire at the level of the individual. In the essay on *O primo Basílio* I discussed earlier, Oliveira correctly stressed the possibility that Basílio was exploiting Luísa as his lover, and that that exploitation could be understood as analogous to his actions planting rubber. In the case of "Singularidades," the question becomes slightly less schematic, because Macário's desire for the blonde Luísa does have to do with what he sees in her. His desire has some psychological verisimilitude, but it is also an allegory. In other words, Macário's gaze is in question, and it shapes how the narrative, with all its contradictions, is constructed. Her characterization allows us to see that Luísa is not properly exploited; in fact, she might have been desired precisely because she was not seen at all.

In making such a claim, I am blending the slave trade with colonialism. It seems to me that the two phenomena are the same. However, it is important to stress that to nineteenth-century minds, this might not have been the case. While the slave trade was being combatted and silenced, colonialism was being praised. Nevertheless, I believe that Eça de Queiroz linked them not only in his "Singularidades," but also in most of his literary work.

Luísa's characterization in "Singularidades" might enable us to understand how colonialism is, there, read as an allegory. Luísa, the thief, resembles England—or, even better, the British Empire. This association can be seen when Macário describes how her blondeness induced him to see her as the daughter of an Englishman, even though there is otherwise very little proof of such an origin for her. "Era uma rapariga de vinte anos, talvez, fina, fresca, loira como uma vinheta inglesa," (172)[10] Macário said. This association is only increased when Macário admires Luísa's Chinese fan:

> Era um leque magnífico e naquele tempo inesperado nas mãos plebeias de uma rapariga vestida de cassa. Mas como ela era loira e a mãe tão meridional, Macário, com intuição interpretativa dos namorados, disse à sua curiosidade: será filha de um inglês. O inglês vai à China, à Pérsia, a Ormuz, à Austrália, e vem cheio

[10] "She was a girl of about twenty perhaps, slender, fresh, and as fair as an Englishwoman" (92).

> daquelas jóias dos luxos exóticos, e nem Macário sabia porque é que aquela ventarola de mandarina o preocupava assim: mas segundo ele me disse—aquilo deu-lhe no goto (173).[11]

Given the way the short story ends, it is quite likely that the fan was purloined, as were most of Luisa's fashion objects—including an Indian scarf. All can easily be read as symbols of colonization. However, it is interesting that Macário, as a character, associates Luísa's desirability with English colonial commerce. It is his imagination, and nothing else, that attributes to her an English commercial father. Moreover, the Mandarin fan is one of the elements that spurred his desire. It is this desire—so linked to international commercial activity—that leads Macário himself to be involved in the South Atlantic commerce, even though the psychological outcome is multivalent. It is possible to come to many different readings of this materialist aspect of Macário's desire, especially regarding the relationship between British practices and their admirers in Portugal.[12]

Much of what Macário saw in Luísa mirrors the main contradictions of Portuguese society. The same girl whom he assumed to be of English origin could be related to his own beautiful English cursive, which he himself praises twice in his account. The English admiration is so important that it is actually the shape in which he constructs the design of his own writing. The disappearance and appearance of an Indian scarf is even more significant, because it stresses the contradictions within Macário's narration. The scarf disappears from the store while Luísa and Macário are there—and, eventually, we can infer that the object was stolen by her. A blonde, English-looking woman steals an Indian object—echoing British imperialism. The significance of the scarf, however, is not limited either to its function in the central story or to its allegory of mercantile exchanges. Macário is not a fully reliable narrator. In fact, the many layers of narration would allow us to easily stress this. When he goes to ask his uncle for help with his finances, before he goes to Cape Verde, the old man—who was against the

[11] "It was a magnificent fan, and it was surprising to find such a fan in the plebeian hands of a girl dressed in simple muslin. However, since she was blonde and her mother dark, Macário, with the intuitive interpretive skills of one in love, said to his curious heart: 'She must be the daughter of an Englishman.' The English go to China, Persia, Hormuz, Australia and return laden down with exotic luxuries like that; even Macário didn't know quite why that Chinese fan preoccupied him so, but in his own words: 'it caught his fancy'" (93).

[12] A good example is Afonso da Maia's obsession in raising his grandson with British manners in *Os Maias*.

marriage—is wearing an Indian scarf![13] Many extrapolations could be drawn from this second—and final—appearance of an Indian scarf in the short story. In an extreme reading, one might argue that it was Macário who stole it; after all, he is often a less-than-reliable narrator of his own story. However, this question, and its implications for the story, extend beyond the topic of this paper—and will be addressed in a different one.

For my purposes at the moment, the important thing is that many material aspects that Macário admires so much in his Luísa are already aspects of his material world, and of his own desires, even though they are all frustrated at the end. Psychologically, Macário never actually saw Luísa as herself—maybe not even when he accuses her of being a thief. As an allegorical figure of the material itself, she might also be read as the story's voiding of the psychological register in which that obliviousness might be understood: she *is* the exchange, including the exchange of human persons, that he undertakes, and therefore not a person to be understood, or seen, at all. Sagaciously, for a short story with "singularities" in the title, many of the aspects of the blonde girl are, after all, generalities assumed by Macário.

Macário's rejection of Luísa is embedded in moralism that contradicts his own initial colonialist desires for everything that her image represented for him. His realization that she is a thief might be less about her possible kleptomania, and more about his own moral affairs. Macário, involved with the slave trade and colonialism, is rather severe with a woman whose possible crimes are significantly less problematic than his, even by nineteenth-century standards. The uncovering of the crime, however, might be said to trigger his stern rejection. It is as if this were his cathartic moment understanding his own moral issues; in this sense, it has very little to do with Luísa herself. While he finally comes to despise Luísa, he thereby denies his former desire, at first fomented by her colonial features—the fan, the Englishness, the blondeness. Impressively, his cathartic rejection happens to be near a poster of the play *Palafoz em Saragoça* [*sic*]. While it is uncertain

[13] In fact, he is wearing it in the moment that he is refusing to allow his nephew to marry Luísa: "O tio Francisco, que fazia a barba à janela, com o lenço da Índia amarrado na cabeça, voltou-se, e pondo os óculos, fitou-o.
—A sua carteira lá está. Fique, e acrescentou com um gesto decisivo – solteiro" (185) ("Uncle Francisco, who was shaving, standing at the window with an Indian scarf tied around his head, turned round, put on his glasses and looked at him.
'Your desk is over there. All you have to do,' he said making a resolute gesture, 'is to stay single'"[105]).

whether the poster refers to the homonymic play of 1812 by António Xavier Ferreira de Azevedo,[14] the events that inspired the play's argument are easy to infer from its title. Palafox is a reference to José de Palafox and his battle against the French siege of Zaragoza in 1808. Although the Spanish forces eventually fell to the French army, Palafox became a war hero in the battle against the invasion. Any conclusions drawn from this element would be speculative, but it is interesting that the battle of a nation for its freedom against foreign invasion appears in a moment when Luísa, the girl Macário wanted to have an English father, is being dismissed.

Eça de Queiroz was no stranger to such cathartic moments that could be read (or perhaps overread) as representations of the belated flourishing of Portugal's morality. According to historian João Medina, a similar confrontation can be inferred in Eça's late and unfinished novel *A ilustre casa dos Ramires*, where the protagonist, a Portuguese aristocrat, confronts a man with a blond beard. In Medina's reading, the blond man is, again, a representation of England, while Ramires is Portugal. However, this confrontation happens after the English Ultimatum of 1890, in which England positioned itself to counter Portugal's aspirations to connect their colonies in Africa and create just one, unique Portuguese land stretching from today's Angola to Mozambique. The moment in which "Singularidades" was written is significantly diverse, prior to major colonialist plans for Africa, but little after the official end of the transatlantic slave trade—a movement in which the United Kingdom and—more importantly—the United States campaigned heavily against Portuguese interests. Therefore, there was still a fairly antagonistic relationship between Portugal and England.

Moreover, if Medina's assertion that a large part of the formulation of national character in Eça de Queiroz's work was related to moral behavior, the immoral conduct of many of Eça's characters can often be explained by the link between overseas commercial activity and their disruptive desire. Macário's overseas activities could be linked not only to the slave trade of the Monfortes in *Os Maias* or the rubber fortune made by Basílio in South America; but also to Teodoro's pact with the devil in Eça's *O Mandarim*, in which the protagonist chooses to have a stranger, a wealthy Chinese man unknown to him, killed so he can inherit an impressive fortune that he spends, at the end of the novel, on prostitutes. If this is

[14] This hypothesis is not fully unlikely given that the event of Macário's rejection might have happened around 1823–1833, according to the narrator, not so long after the first run and publication of António Xavier's play. However, there are many possible alternatives to be contemplated.

not a metaphor for colonialism in the late nineteenth century, I do not know what could be.

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So, maybe one could summarize "Singularidades" in these terms: Macário is a man connected to a family of trade officials who might have been involved for centuries in the slave trade, but he himself has never gone to Africa. He falls madly in love with an illusion of a woman, Luísa, who for him resembles whatever he expects English imperialism to be. The illusion is so complete for him that he becomes an unreliable narrator who often plays with tropes of English imperialism, especially in regard to Portuguese colonial activities. Luísa is suggested to have taken a Portuguese coin during a party, a Chinese fan, and an Indian scarf. All these accusations can easily be linked to the tense relationship between the two nations during the nineteenth century, culminating in the Ultimatum of 1890.

For reasons that are not very clear, Macário's uncle is against his love affair, forcing Macário to work in Africa in the slave trade if he wants to get married. Such a decision forces Macário-the-narrator to refer to his activities only obliquely, by suggestion, since they were commonly known, but little spoken about at the time. When he returns and, after much struggle, is finally reinstated in his uncle's firm, he comes to the realization that the blonde Luísa represents just a finer version of his own colonialism and, sickened by her attitudes, he ends up rejecting her altogether. This final coup de force of Macário is not uncommon in Eça's prose, being reiterated or hoped for in many of his works. A famous case would be Gonçalo Ramiro and the blond men in *A ilustre casa dos Ramires*. Macário's reassuring assertion of Portuguese autonomy does not, by any means, imply that he stopped working in the business of enslaving people, just that he ceases to idealize English imperialism as he once did.

Macário, nevertheless, is not the "realist and positivist" narrator that the storyteller might be induced to believe he is. In fact, he is quite unreliable himself. And, from the start of his account, Eça makes clear that even the most positive narrators have their moments of weakness in the face of a cemetery on the dark night. Eça, then, is inviting us to read his narration, even when the narrator is not a character, with attentive eyes. Mácario, as a narrator, is himself compelling, but unreliable. Be it by the omissions of his colonial activities in Cape Verde, be it by

the fact that, though he wants to incriminate Luísa throughout his account, his attention to detail reveals that he himself might have stolen something too—especially the Indian scarf that his uncle is going to wear when he finally accepts Luísa as part of his family—one learns to suspect his account of the story's events. Macário, then, allows us to question and incriminate him more than poor Luísa, who now appears to be a kleptomaniac who says little during the story and who is discarded as quickly as she was once intensely loved.

Summarizing Eça's story in such a way empties narration of all its great ambiguity but allows us to underline possible guidelines to expand readings of Eça's narrative style, especially when associating literary studies—in the broadest sense of the term—with more historically informed approaches. If there are secret /stories in all of Eça de Queiroz's fictional works, they would often be linked to some of the idiosyncrasies of Portuguese modernization. Eça, however, more than a mere historian, makes that a premise to complicate the narrative form. The colonialism in "Singularidades" uses the silent and silenced history of the Portuguese slave trade as part of its secret second story. Eça's continuous attention to material beings is here used to stress its allegorical and/or symbolic power for a peripheral imperial society.

Two points, nevertheless, remain unresolved. First, how many Macários are still out there in Eça's texts? How many hidden colonial agents are there in Eça's fiction? And what happens if we read them as such—slave traders, colonizers, secretly brutal individuals? Second, if Eça's secret story was already silenced before the story was even written, how secretive is it actually? Is Eça de Queiroz composing a classic short story, as Poe and Quiroga did, or something modern and new? The terms of Piglia, so instigating a thinker, seem to be abstract enough that a complete answer is far from obvious. Eça here certainly engages modernity and its effects, but by debating what might have been the most archaic practice of Portuguese colonialism. The evident story of "Singularidades" has a striking plot twist: Luísa is a thief. Nevertheless, it is its secret story that lingers more, without resolution: Macário was a slave trader, likely from the beginning of the story, when working with his uncle, when he went to Cape Verde, and perhaps even when he met the unnamed story narrator in a guest house in Minho. Consider, however, the possibility that this unnamed narrator, who states at the beginning of the story that he is naturally positivist and realist, has, without naming it as such, encountered in Macário a manifestation not merely, as he seems to think, of a personal tendency,

at odds with his realist convictions, to be tyrannized by his imagination, but, more profoundly, of the chimerical past of Portugal: an apparition who embodies the open secret of Portuguese society that thereby haunts the reader, spectrally.

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