

# Of Filth, Feces and Fornication: the Aesthetics of Abjection in *Os Maias*

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**Abstract:** This article provides an alternative reading of one of Eça's most widely read and discussed texts, *Os Maias*, by challenging the common interpretation of the text as primarily about the incestuous relationship between the siblings Carlos and Maria Eduarda. Through a discussion of the aesthetics of abjection present throughout the novel, this study de-emphasizes the incest trope in order to examine *Os Maias* as a coherent text of abjection in which incest becomes part of a greater abject whole. Drawing from Julia Kristeva, this article discusses bodily abjection as a reaction to unwanted circumstances that are symptomatic of fin-de-siècle degeneracy.

**Keywords:** Eça de Queirós, *Os Maias*, Julia Kristeva, Mary Douglas, abjection, filth, excrements, degeneracy.

*“There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable.”*

Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* (1)

One of Eça's most discussed literary moments is without doubt the last part of his voluminous novel *Os Maias* (1888), coming to a climax in the flaring revelation that the lovers Maria Eduarda and Carlos are siblings and have spent several months from the beginning of summer to late autumn enthralled in

a passionate love affair. The trope of incest has been a constant topic throughout academic readings of the text: the meticulously constructed plot culminates in the discovery of Maria Eduarda's true identity as Carlos's long-lost and presumably dead sister and points to their incestuous relationship as the apex of the novel.<sup>1</sup>

Such approaches to Eça's novels are not uncommon: readers and critics typically perceive *O primo Basílio* as Eça's novel of adultery par excellence and *O crime do Padre Amaro* as his most notable novel of ecclesiastic corruption. Yet this is where my perception of *Os Maias* differs from traditional readings, which view the whole novel through the lens of the incestuous dénouement. On the one hand, I concur that what distinguishes *Os Maias* from among Eça's literary texts is the shock effect of the novel's outcome, necessarily rendering all subsequent readings a game of reconstruction of the innumerable indications of the incestuous relationship that in hindsight seem altogether too obvious and too impossible.<sup>2</sup> Such selective readings tend to focus on a one-track approach guided solely by the incest motif and run the risk of potentially distorting the significance of incest at the detriment of other themes in the novel. On all accounts *Os Maias* is one of Eça's most humorous, well-written, suspenseful, provocative, and ironically painful narratives; as a whole it should not be considered as secondary but rather complementary to the revelation of incest that comes in the last portion of the novel.

Moreover, the revelation that Maria is not Castro Gomes's wife—and the ensuing emotional and psychological torment—is equally as important of a narrative twist as the ultimate revelation of incest from the point of view of the main protagonist Carlos. Nevertheless, critics have overlooked this sequence of events by focusing mostly on the incestuous *agnorisis*. Counter-current to this tendency, the present study aims to de-emphasize the incest theme by viewing it as a pretext for the novel rather than its main focal point. As such, I read *Os Maias* as a novel of abjection rather than a novel of incest by discussing what I label the "aesthetics of abjection". I contend that abjection taints all aspects of the novel; and although it prepares the reader for the ultimate revelation of sexual incest, abjection through but also *beyond* incest provides an all-encompassing framework to understand *Os Maias* as a cohesive thematic text.

To bridge the gap between the traditionally perceived importance of incest and the typically less-discussed remainder of the text, I am guided by Peter

Brooks' statement, which applies most pointedly to Eça's pseudo-naturalist text<sup>3</sup>: "Realism as the ugly stands close to realism as the shocking, that which transgresses the bounds of the acceptable and the representable" (8). As I discuss the aesthetics of abjection in *Os Maias*, I aim to understand how the *shocking* (most notably the unwelcome discoveries of Maria's true identity as MacGren and then as Carlos's sister) resonates semantically and analogically with the *ugly* (the pervasive abject) as broadly perceived throughout the text. Without neglecting the semantic and narrative importance of incest in the text, my emphasis on abjection aims to highlight how the prohibited love affair is the continuation and logical conclusion of a micro-society steeped in degeneration, perversion and nausea, and how abjection and especially abject eroticism are indicative of a larger doomed situation. My reading differs from previous scholarship by exploring the nexuses between different forms of abjection and considering abjection as a coherent theoretical frame through which to navigate Eça's *paso doble* between the *ugly* and the *shocking*.<sup>4</sup> As I discuss in this article, the internal cohesion of Eça's work renders abjection rather than incest the most pervasive trope in the text. As such, incest can be conceived as part of a greater abject whole that constitutes an even more powerful symbol of fin-de-siècle national degeneracy.<sup>5</sup>

### Engendering the Abject

Contemporary readings of the abject owe much to the theoretical writings of psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva, in particular her seminal 1980 *Powers of Horror*, where she first introduces and defines the concept with ample examples. In this colorful theoretical litany, Kristeva distinguishes three broad categories of abjects against which various social and individual taboos are erected: food, waste, and the signs of sexual difference, categories that correspond roughly to oral, anal and genital erotogenic drives.<sup>6</sup> All three of these categories of abjects are interwoven throughout Eça's text, with prominence given to waste and sexuality. What critics have referred to as tragic interplay (with the format of the text also re-enacting the movements of a classic tragedy) can also be interpreted on a local, carnal level as an abject double bind that works primarily through the body, its drives and irreconcilable desires.<sup>7</sup> The dynamics of abjection differ from those of tragedy in the manner in which the protagonists

react to their “unmerited misfortune” once they are aware of their downfall. As detailed in Aristotle’s *Poetics*, the *peripeteia* is a self-destructive action taken in blindness, in which for the audience the effect is best produced and most capable of inspiring fear and pity through surprise (Part xiii; Part ix). Whereas in tragedy it is customary for protagonists to overcome the fatal flaw through their heroic qualities, in the case of abjection, the hero/heroine is simultaneously subjugated to intense attraction and repulsion from which there is no immediate respite, and the outcome is not necessarily heroic.

Bodily abjection can be understood as the physical reaction to contrary impulses stemming from objects. It entails a simultaneous physical attraction and repulsion, a desire to be freed from a captivating bond but the impossibility to separate oneself from the object source. Kristeva’s work on the object is pertinent for engaging with cultural, social and sexual taboos (illicit relationships such as fornication and of course incest) since, in her work, as in Eça’s novel itself, the body takes center stage. As Kristeva writes, “abjection is an extremely strong feeling which is at once somatic and symbolic, and which is above all a revolt of the person against an external menace from which one wants to keep oneself at a distance, but of which one has the impression that it is not only an external menace but that it may menace us from inside” (135). Through reactions and experiences of the body and its drives, the subject interacts with the world around it in a quest to maintain its own subjectivity. Abjection destabilizes the vulnerable subject through both external and internal causes. The conjoining of the somatic and the symbolic is at the core of my reading of *Os Maias*, an approach that enables an understanding of these external and internal menaces that constitute the plot and beg a parallel examination of the object in relation to bodily functions such as nausea, sexual practices and excrements that permeate the novel.

These physical reactions are present in the narrative as the protagonists are faced with uncomfortable and unexpected news and irreconcilable situations: the disgust felt by Carlos as Castro Gomes reads Dâmaso’s ‘anonymous’ letter; the disclosure that Maria Eduarda is Madame MacGren; the repulsion Carlos feels towards the Countess de Gouvarinho<sup>8</sup>; Carlos and Ega’s reaction to Dâmaso’s article for the “Corneta do Diabo”; and ultimately, the shocking knowledge of incest as experienced by both Carlos and Ega.

As these examples indicate, in *Os Maias*, bodily abjection befalls prominently on Carlos. Whereas Maria Eduarda is mostly portrayed as passive and acted upon by external menaces, Carlos, the main protagonist, appears rather to react to the facts that are thrown before him. A close reading of the text reveals that Maria Eduarda, a single mother fighting for survival in London and then Paris, has limited possibilities given the circumstances dictated by her condition. Only certain moments in the novel provide a glimpse of Maria Eduarda dominating her surroundings, as when Carlos shows her around the Toca and she strides throughout the house, demanding certain alterations, Carlos walking radiantly behind her, as though he were merely “um velho senhorio” (431). Such moments are rare in the novel, which portrays a partial, one-sided account of the Carlos/Maria affair in which for the most part Maria’s thoughts, feelings and reactions are eclipsed. Because of this in *Os Maias* bodily abjection and its obverse reaction are primarily present in Carlos’s experience and the male protagonists surrounding him, Ega in particular.<sup>9</sup>

This gender divide that carries over to an engendering of the aesthetics of abjection merits further discussion and is most apparent in relation to the borders intrinsic to the abject. Central to Kristeva’s theory of the abject is the notion of ambiguity linked to borders, or rather, to the defilement of these boundaries. For Kristeva, the abject is a realm where drives and signifiers are confused, or mixed up; where there are some kinds of sublimating symbolic attachments, but only imperfect ones. As Kristeva notes,

we may call it a border: abjection is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it—on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger. But also, abjection itself is a compromise of judgment and affect, of condemnation and yearning, of signs and drives. Abjection preserves what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationship, in the immemorial violence with which the body becomes separated from another body in order to be—maintaining that night in which the outline of the signified thing vanishes and where only the imponderable affect is carried out. (*Powers of Horror* 9-10)

What Kristeva terms “abject” is therefore that which threatens boundaries, since these borders or boundaries enable a person to perceive his or her own subjectivity as a separate being. The abject exerts a pull towards the place where meaning collapses; it destabilizes and projects the subject into a fragile state akin to that of an animal. In short, the abject is everything that threatens the collapse of order and of meaning and the annihilation of the self.

One of the most revealing moments in the novel that foregrounds the engendering of abjection from the standpoint of borders is the carriage episode that juxtaposes Carlos’s two heartthrobs, Maria Eduarda and the Countess de Gouvarinho, in a scene steeped in abjection, repulsion, violent hatred, and horror. Carlos, already deeply involved with Maria Eduarda, has neglected the Countess, who in a final moment of despair barges unannounced into the Ramalhete family home.

To avoid further scandal, Carlos takes the Countess on a carriage ride. Tormented by his indifference, she throws herself at his feet as she accuses him of silence and ignorance, “um desprezo brutal, um desprezo grosseiro...” (442). In the name of honor and nobility, Carlos attempts to convince the Countess that their relationship was nothing more than a “capricho apaixonado, que não podia durar,” its end inevitable. His lightweight promise, something on the order of “let’s be friends,” is sugarcoated by his casting this as a more noble friendship, “uma amizade agradável e mais nobre” (443), that would avoid their relationship ending in scandal, or becoming a banal union, similar to a loveless marriage—this thus being a rupture that would ultimately be “for her own good” (444). Killing unmercifully all of the Countess’s dreams of a lasting and meaningful relationship, Carlos’s abrupt termination of this pseudo-amorous relationship through this easy conclusion bears reminiscences of a scene in another of Eça’s novels, *O primo Basílio*, where cousin Basílio’s patronizing attitude towards Luísa brings her to realize that their relationship is far from the romanticized fairytale she had imagined: “Mas sê razoável, minha querida. Uma ligação como a nossa não é um dueto do Fausto” (*Primo Basílio* 213). In *Os Maias* this moment of intense narrative drama is exasperated by the juxtaposition of Maria Eduarda’s image on that of the Countess, and the fact that the latter has torn Carlos away from his comfortable soirée at Ramalhete to torture

him with her pathetic crying. Carlos' repulsion towards Gouvarinho heightens as he imagines Maria Eduarda in an idealized *locus amoenus*: "tranquila àquela hora na sua sala de repes vermelho, fazendo serão, confiando nele, pensando nele, relembando as felicidades da véspera, quando a Toca, cheia dos seus amores, dormia, branca entre as árvores..." (446). As Gouvarinho attempts to embrace his neck, Carlos brusquely shoves her away, and this gesture gives way to the ultimate, heartless declaration that his affair with her is over. He is overcome by horror at the sight of her. The Countess de Gouvarinho, in a state of shock, ends up in a fetal-like position, bent over in a corner of the carriage, miserable and looking half-dead, weeping softly behind her veil. This intolerable sight provokes repulsion and disgust in Carlos. In this scene, through the male-tinted lens of the narrator, the Countess de Gouvarinho *is* the object. The idealized and romanticized Maria Eduarda causes Carlos to brutally shove the Countess away, in a pitiless act of physical violence that is somewhat uncharacteristic of Eça's work (446).

Furthermore, since the novel portrays the Countess as a maternal figure throughout the first part of the text, there is an additional reading that codes her as object: she is an object to be expelled so that the boundaries between self and other can be clearly drawn. Gouvarinho impinges on Carlos's subjectivity, and he feels the urgent impulse to free himself from her, physically, emotionally, and socially. This scene can be read symbolically as parallel to Kristeva's description of the process of separation from the mother as "a violent, clumsy breaking away, with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling" (13). While Carlos attempts to remove—elegantly at first and then brutally—all expectations of a continued liaison with the Countess, she trumps by vilifying his idealized relationship with Maria Eduarda, belittling Maria by referring to her with the following terms: "a outra", "a brasileira", "a aventureira" (446). In a last act of desperation, Gouvarinho defiles Maria Eduarda and Carlos's relationship by debasing it to the level of what is considered, in Kristeva's words, "unacceptable, unclean and anti-social". Framing the object of the situation in these terms leaves Carlos with no other solution than to expel or repress his ties to the Countess. As quoted above, he frees himself from her in a violent, clumsy manner; and this moment of dramatic abjection,

uncanniness and quasi-violence, brings into focus the notion of borders, and Carlos's desperation to remain fully in control of his feelings and actions and regain an independent subjectivity. Both Carlos and the Countess are filled with hatred, Carlos "com os punhos fechados, como para a espancar"; their eyes in the dark "dardejavam o ódio que os enchia" (446). Foreshadowing Castro Gomes's earth-shattering visit, at the conclusion of this scene the Countess de Gouvarinho spitefully tells Carlos to go ahead and leave her for the adventure-seeking Brazilian woman who has beguiled him, since her husband is now broke and she needs "quem lhe pague as modistas" (446).

The idea of entrapment is at the forefront of this scene, once again from the engendered perspective of the main male protagonist Carlos. He is physically and symbolically trapped within the carriage, unable to escape as he is compelled to keep the carriage moving from Ramalhete to the Aterro, there and back twice. This episode between Carlos and the Countess is an unpleasant premonition of Carlos's later need to expel Maria Eduarda in a similar manner—both from his life metaphorically, and physically, from his bed, no longer to prevent corporeal decay (as would be the case of the primary abject) but to avoid societal and moral degeneracy as per the norms of the society at the time. Ironically, however, an earlier moment in the narrative had positioned Carlos as a young man yearning for liberation at the opposite end of this entrapment motif. Written with a pinch of sarcastic humor, when Carlos is first getting to know Maria, he can barely control his urge to consume their relationship, but is trapped by Maria's chaste desire to stagnate in the present. Maria Eduarda expresses the pleasure of the trajectory in the following conversation, rich in sexual undertones: "E para que se há-de acabar? O grande prazer é andá-lo a fazer, pois não acha? [...] Para que se há-de querer chegar logo ao fim das coisas?" (405) To which Carlos responds, discouraged: "Queria ela pois conservá-lo ali, arrastado como o bordado, sempre acrescentado e sempre incompleto, guardado também no cesto da costura, para ser o desafogo da sua solidão?" (406). The symbolic presence of Maria Eduarda's embroidery, an explicitly feminine gendered object, parallels the development of the relationship dynamic between Carlos and Maria Eduarda. If in the scene referred to above Carlos compares himself with frustration to the kept, incomplete



embroidered garment, later he will regret this same “chaste embroidery” (487), an aspect to which I will return.

### Carnal Relationships and ‘Filth’ at the Margins

Abjection permeates Carlos and Maria Eduarda’s relationship, which the text portrays as first and foremost a physical affair—albeit, as mentioned above, perceived exclusively through Carlos’s point of view. Although the reader can only speculate concerning Maria Eduarda’s experience, the relationship between the siblings is conceived as essentially carnal long before incest is mentioned.<sup>10</sup> This corresponds to the narrator’s description of Carlos, which, unlike the more multi-faceted descriptions of Afonso, Pedro da Maia, Ega or Dâmaso, focuses only on his physical traits.<sup>11</sup> Fitting with my argument that incest appears as the ultimate link in a long chain of developments steeped in abjection, the “incestuousness” of the relationship is secondary to its essential carnal nature, as prominently described in the text. A case in point is the direction the relationship takes once Maria is installed in Os Olivais, where the couple invariably seeks moments to be out of earshot and view of the British governess Ms. Sarah so that they might indulge in moments of intense sensuality within the walls of the Japanese pavilion (455-56). Their insatiable desire, confined to these seemingly short mornings, leaves them longing for even more intense encounters, a feeling that is mutual as we read in the narrator’s commentary (also one of the rare mentions of Maria’s point of view): “Maria desejava essa noite tão ardentemente como ele” (457). Carlos then begins to return to the Toca for nightly rendezvous in seek of a more prolonged, passionate and intimate relationship. Shortly after, the narrator depicts Carlos flanking the walls of the Toca grounds. He is overcome by a vague sense of melancholy and nervousness at the proximity of this “posse tão desejada” (458) and whose materialization will leave him in a state of ecstasy, “esplêndidamente feliz” (459). At this point the sensuality of their relationship is continuously renewed and amplified, with ardent kisses, embraces and touching dominating each encounter.

Even in other settings, such as following the dinner at Ramallete on the eve of Carlos’s departure for Santa Olávia, he makes good on his innocent threat to “devour her in his cave” with incessant embracing (467-70). Before the

characteristically inopportune interruption by Ega returning from Sintra, the couple, in a romantic daze, only wishes to remain enraptured in Carlos's private quarters: "Nunca Carlos a achara tão linda, tão perfeita [...]. E o mesmo desejo invadia-os a ambos, de ficarem ali eternamente, naquele quarto de rapaz..." (471).

Ideally, as Carlos later confides in Ega, he would run away with Maria Eduarda; in his view, neither he nor Maria Eduarda would tolerate the impossible situation of her alternating between him as her lover and her husband Castro Gomes (418). Faced with this situation and supposing (incorrectly, of course) that Castro Gomes *is* her husband, Carlos envisions with some regret the pain he would cause his grandfather but even for the sake of Afonso, the only father figure he ever knew, but is not willing to compromise his own happiness. As denoted by the enthusiastic superlative "decididíssimo!" (418), Carlos's immutable conviction to live with Maria Eduarda far away from Lisbon takes precedence over all other considerations. Even before Carlos experiences the first major setback—finding out that Maria Eduarda is not Castro Gomes's wife—he knows that his decision will be fueling the history of the Maia family as an endless cycle "de adultérios, de fugas, de dispersões, sob *o bruto aguilhão da carne!*" (452, italics mine). Carlos speculates that in the eyes of Afonso, their relationship most likely appears to the patriarch as "concupinagem", "libertinagem" or "o horror de uma fatalidade" (452), in contrast to Carlos's idealized view that his love for Maria Eduarda is much more than any of his previous 'adventures' and leans towards a divine, mystical, out-of-this-world experience: "ao seu amor misturava-se alguma coisa de religioso" (417). There is a clear discrepancy between the reality of their purely carnal relationship and how Carlos represents this relationship either to himself or to his confidant Ega. Self-delusion? Perhaps, for in his interior monologues and conversations with Ega their love transcends the mundane, in stark contrast to the omniscient narrative that portrays Carlos and Maria mainly engaging in carnal pleasures.

Given the illicit nature of their relationship, it could clearly not continue at the heart of Lisbon, next to the popular meeting place of the Grémio and only a few steps from the Chiado, a proximity that in Maria Eduarda's words had become intolerable, "demasiadamente acessível aos importunos" (406). The situation of the Toca love-nest, in Os Olivais at an hour's carriage-ride

from Lisbon, with its large gated entrance and secluded wooded surroundings, foreshadows the ultimate push to the margins of society that would be the fate of the incestuous couple. Carlos declares his desire to live their relationship far removed from society when he expresses his enthusiasm to install Maria Eduarda in Craft's country home: "Minha cara amiga, se fosse possível que a nossa afeição se passasse fora do mundo, distante de todos os olhares, ao abrigo de todas as suspeitas, seria delicioso..." (415). Yet this is a utopia that is impossible in practical terms. At the end of autumn, when Maria exclaims how wonderful Lisbon is during sunny winter days, Carlos is quick to respond "Pois sim, mas o Chiado, a coscuvilhice, os politiquetes, as gazetas, todos os horrores... A mim está-me positivamente a apetecer uma cubata na África!" (535). This voluntarily marginalized position, whether literal or imagined, underlines the need to maintain their relationship removed from the status quo, from society, from the judging eye of culture. Throughout these scenes there is a constant and ardent desire for the couple to withdraw themselves from the rest of society and very little explicit mention of their relationship being viewed as a moral transgression, other than on the occasions that Carlos's mind wanders and he is brought to consider what he presumes would be Afonso's moral stance.<sup>12</sup>

In contrast to these qualms, when they enjoy their "hideaway"<sup>13</sup> in Os Olivais, Carlos is overcome by "um extraordinário conforto moral" (454). The moral bliss that Carlos feels corresponds to his finally being able to engage in a more complete relationship with Maria; and the consciousness of their illicit relationship is put on hold through this distance from the capital, avoiding, as Kelly Oliver writes, the abjection that comes from moral infractions in the form of "a threatening otherness that Christianity calls 'sin'" (56). At this stage, Carlos avoids the pull of abjection with its inevitable attraction and repulsion. As soon as he enters the grounds of the country cottage, he is enwrapped by a sense of peace, harmony and tenderness. Despite Carlos's representation and self-delusion of an ethereal relationship with Maria Eduarda, undertones of eroticism permeate the narrative: from the phallic pleasure with which Carlos slowly introduces the key into the lock of the residence that is now hers (429), to the ecstasy of possessing everything. What entails is an overwhelming feeling of self-sufficiency, as verbalized in statements such as "Nós temos gelo,

temos tudo! Não nos falta nada...” or depicted in mutual self-engrossment such as passionately drinking champagne out of the same cup (433). The emphatic need to give their house of paradise a name, “Toca”, resonates with the impetus to dominate and to possess their love nest, symbolically expressed by painting the name boldly in red letters on the residence’s gate as though marking their unique and private territory.

Drawing from Mary Douglas’ 1966 material in *Purity and Danger*, Kristeva proposes that what each society calls ‘filth’ is that which threatens a social or moral order (69-70). At this stage of Eça’s text, Ega and Carlos are mainly concerned with social impact; religion and morality, when mentioned, are reduced to outward appearances and rituals. When Carlos considers Maria’s position vis-à-vis religion, he concludes that all summer long she had been content with their illicit relationship: “Nunca ela tornara, em todo o Verão, a aludir a uma união diferente dessa em que os seus corações viviam tão lealmente, tão confortavelmente. Não Maria não era uma devota, preocupada ‘do pecado mortal’! Que lhe podia importar a estola banal do padre?...” (533). Until the threat of the public revealing of Maria’s shady past, their distance from Lisbon is enough to muffle all moral, social and religious qualms.

Following the calumnious article destined for publication in the “Corneta do Diabo” (a newspaper that lives up to its name), Carlos wonders if it will ever be socially acceptable for him to marry Maria: “Carlos perguntou, pela primeira vez a si mesmo, se a honra doméstica, a honra social, a pureza dos homens de quem descendia, a dignidade dos homens que dele descendessem, lhe permitiam em verdade casar com ela...” (533). This threat of the “promiscuous broadcast of the private” (Brooks 12) is what Carlos most fears in his long stream of conscience in which he explores many different ‘what ifs’: “E se tivesse um filho? O seu filho, já homem, ativo e puro, poderia um dia ler numa ‘Corneta do Diabo’ que sua mãe fora amante de um brasileiro, depois de ser amante de um irlandês” (533). Well before knowing they are siblings, Maria is mainly concerned with what her presumably puritan and virginal governess Ms. Sarah thinks of her prolonged siestas enclosed with Carlos in the Japanese pavilion of the Toca, where they escape from the main house out of earshot and behind closed windows. (456). Here we can apply Douglas’ proposal that all societies establish rituals or

ceremonial forms that help avoid contact with ‘filth,’ or where contact is unavoidable—help to keep its impact within limits or to decontaminate the people and the places that may now be sources of danger (96-97).

As Carlos contemplates the surroundings of the Toca and the village in the distance whose name he does not know, he is overcome with a feeling of solitude and tranquility: “deu a Carlos um desejo repentino de sossego e de obscuridade, num canto assim do mundo, à beira de água, onde ninguém o conhecesse nem houvesse ‘Cornetas do Diabo’, e ele pudesse ter a paz de um simples e de um pobre debaixo de quatro telhas, no seio de quem amava...” (535). In this episode of *Os Maias*, and from here on out in the narrative, the threat of dissolution and disruption looms large as Carlos, a respected and well-known figure of this fictional Lisbon society, faces the outcome of societal taboo that then progresses towards the knowledge of his incest. The threads of the aesthetics of abjection thicken around this relationship that has taken a more serious turn in the secluded residence of the Toca. The fall is greater now that the protagonists have experienced a taste of their desired paradise and developed a more complete relationship, in all senses of the term.

Although it has received little attention by literary critics, equally important as the revelation of incest is the first unwelcome revelation concerning Maria’s true identity, when Carlos finds out that Maria is *not* Mrs. Castro Gomes. Carlos experiences an array of emotions that includes feelings of betrayal, disgust, disappointment, denial, regret, mystification, melancholy, and ultimately anger, not against Maria Eduarda herself but towards this lie “que vinha estragar irremediavelmente o *encanto divino* da sua vida” (492, italics mine), once again making reference to the formerly divine nature of their relationship. He loathes the lie, and in his imagination it becomes “uma coisa material e tangível, de um peso enorme, feia e cor de ferro, esmagando-lhe o coração” (492). A long passage details Carlos’s stream of consciousness that brings him to justify how they could possibly continue their relationship despite this non-negligible lie, this indestructible block of granite (493). This is where the abjection dynamic enters the narrative all the more powerfully, and the aesthetics of abjection are represented by the polluting image that runs deep through this passage.

In this regard, Kristeva's reading of corporeal waste as a form of reaction to abject situations serves to couch my analysis of the visceral responses and metaphors in Eça's text. Kristeva discusses how the subject's reaction is expressed in retching, vomiting, spasms, choking—functions that translate a feeling of disgust. The physical expression of disgust (through vomiting, excretions, etc.) attempts expulsion or distancing from the abject cause. In *Os Maias*, these bodily experiences are invariably mentioned when the protagonists are faced with unwanted and uncomfortable social situations and underline the symbolic nature of these reactions of repulsion. Most obviously, references to latrines in the text evoke cultural and individual horror in the face of unexpected news. The image of the latrine emphasizes the passage of bodily waste between the inside and the outside, to paraphrase Douglas, and the opposition between the clean and the unclean and the need for 'purification'.

Eça introduces references to the latrine in a very interesting manner during an earlier episode in the novel that creates a fascinating situation of *mise-en-abyme* for these major developments of the storyline, and supports my view of abjection as one of the most significant themes at the core of the novel. The poet Alencar, a firm believer in Romanticism as a more elevated form of literature, brutally criticizes Naturalism, which, "com as suas aluviões de obscenidade, ameaçava corromper o pudor social" (163). He emphatically refers to it as "literatura 'latrinária'" (162). Disgusted by this 'New Idea' that troubles and confounds him, and after futile attempts to condemn such iniquitous literature, Alencar ultimately limits himself to discouraging those around him from mentioning "o excremento!," especially during the "hora aseada do jantar" (162). These images that Alencar places in stark contrast (dirt and excrement/cleanliness and morality) frame the development of the plot in which Carlos, fighting to defend his own personal romance worthy of Alencar's unsoiled Romantic prose, comes to the crude realization that all along he has been constructing his own miniseries of "literatura latrinária". In his view, Maria has been living a lie that brings his romantic fantasy crumbling to the ground; from the first intimate encounter onwards, everything has been tainted: "como *um fermento podre*, ficava estragando tudo daí por diante: doces conversas, silêncios, passeios, sestas no calor da quinta, murmúrios de beijos morrendo entre os

cortinados cor de oiro... Tudo *manchado*, tudo *contaminado* por aquela ‘mentira’ primeira que ela dissera sorrindo, com os seus tranquilos olhos límpidos” (493, italics mine). Nussbaum’s work on the emotion of disgust is pertinent here. Following Rozin, she writes that disgust “concerns the borders of the body. Its central idea is that of contamination: the disgusted person feels defiled by the object, thinking that it has somehow entered the self” (14). This is how Carlos reacts to the knowledge of Maria’s true relationship to Castro Gomes, and he debases her in his desperation: “Oh! Se ela pudesse ressurgir outra vez, limpa, clara, do lodo em que afundara, outra vez Maria Eduarda, com o seu casto bordado!...” (487). Ironically as Maria Eduarda will later confront Carlos, why did her presumed marriage to Castro Gomes make her chaste? Isn’t Carlos, also unmarried, equally as “impure” according to the norms of the society in which they live? In Carlos’s hypocritical view, the pollution of this unexpected news has soiled their relationship leaving him with nothing left to live for: “Nada restava. Tudo jazia em estilhaços, no *lodo imundo*” (494, italics mine). In Nussbaum’s terms, he has been defiled, and feels as though this filth has contaminated him.

Carlos’s recollections idealize the memory of Maria prior to Castro Gomes’s visit in contrast to its present unreality and unobtainability as he ponders how divinely beautiful their relationship was (489). Indeed, the ultra-romantic ideal of pure love is brusquely destroyed by Castro Gomes’s visit, revealing that Maria is merely Madame MacGren, a woman he paid for her company (482). Carlos is left with a disheartening feeling of disgust: “A mulher que ele amara e as suas seduções esvaíam-se de repente no ar como um sonho, radiante e *impuro*, de que aquele brasileiro o viera acordar por caridade!” (484, italics mine).<sup>14</sup> Once again, Ega is there for him to voice his humiliation: “Extraordinário, Ega, extraordinário! A coisa mais *abjecta*, a coisa mais *imunda*!” (484, italics mine), Carlos declares.<sup>15</sup> As discussed above, this scene repeats a theme that will remain constant throughout the remainder of the novel: nausea, bodily waste and excrements used metaphorically to express the utter disgust that accompanies the revelation of unwanted truth, as Maria Eduarda, “nobre e amante”, becomes MacGren, “amigada e falsa” (487).

To extend this analysis, Kristeva’s reading of waste can be instrumental to approach the references to excrements present in Eça’s text, often

metaphorically through this image of the latrine. Kristeva emphasizes the “polluting value” of excrements and, by analogy, other objects that “belong to the borders of the body” (71). She writes: “excrement and its equivalents (decay, infection, disease, corpse, etc.) stand for the danger to identity that comes from without: the ego threatened by the non-ego, society threatened by its outside, life by death” (71). Two important aspects stand out in these statements that are useful for the present discussion: on the one hand, the need to expel or distance oneself from undesirable objects or conditions; and on the other hand, the polluting action that hovers at the border of the body, attacking the subject from without. Likewise, Douglas refers to dirt as an all-encompassing notion, “a kind of omnibus compendium which includes all the rejected elements of ordered systems. [...] our pollution behavior is the reaction which condemns our object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications” (35). When faced with unexpected circumstances, the protagonists of *Os Maias* resort to behaviors aimed at defending these “cherished classifications”. Without knowing where next to turn, Carlos in his complete dismay exclaims: “Tudo isso é nojento! [...] Caiu-me a alma a uma latrina, preciso um banho por dentro!” (487). His friend’s response acknowledges that these moral baths are becoming rather frequent, so frequent in fact that Eça de Sá de Almeida Matos deems that there really should be some establishment in the city able to take care of them (487).

Eça’s ironic declaration for institutionalized moral baths is analogical of the late nineteenth-century craze for newly founded establishments to cleanse broadly conceived “unlawfulness”, as theorized for example by Foucault in relation to sexual irregularities and mental illnesses.<sup>16</sup> As is recurrent in Naturalist fiction, this emphasis on filth, excrements and pollution fits within the larger trend in late nineteenth-century fiction to draw from earlier hygienist discourses, often as a metaphor to point to the need to rectify societal degeneracy.<sup>17</sup> In Eça’s work, this trope is repeatedly present as he portrays Portuguese society on the brink of modernity and in great need of urban improvements and hygienic progress similar to other countries in crisis in Europe. As Eça writes from his diplomatic station in England, all these European countries “sofrem de uma crise industrial, de uma crise agrícola, de uma crise política, de uma crise social, de uma crise moral” (*Notas Contemporâneas* 210).



Images of corruption, putrefaction, rot and societal decay are symbolic tropes for the ubiquity of decadence and backwardness, as perceived by Eça. In *Os Maias*, as is also the case, for example, with *A cidade e as serras*, the constant play with scatological references is peppered with humor and linked to sexual promiscuity, adding an additional layer of complexity to the narrative.<sup>18</sup>

The above-mentioned “pollution behavior” (Douglas 35) is likewise apparent in the case of the weasel Dâmaso who, on several occasions, purposefully attempts to soil Ega and Carlos’s reputations. Ega views Dâmaso as his nemesis, the latter having ingratiated himself with Raquel Cohen, Ega’s love interest, in Sintra; Ega only lacks an excuse to “aniquilar aquele animal!” (474). In the name of morality, Ega claims: “É um dever de moralidade, de asseio público, de gosto, varrer aquela bola de lama humana” (474). If at this point of the narrative Carlos does not appear too interested in Dâmaso, the situation soon changes drastically when Castro Gomes appears in Lisbon and goes to the Ramalhete with an “anonymous” letter telling Gomes all about Carlos and Maria’s love affair. The letter, quite appropriately, ends with the claim that Carlos is “defamando o nome honrado de Vossa Excelência [Castro Gomes] [...] pelas lamas da capital” (480). This backstabbing behavior represents yet another form of abjection interwoven into Eça’s text. According to Kristeva, abjection is also “sinister, scheming, and shady: [...] a hatred that smiles, [...] a friend who stabs you” (4). The impact of this abject act, carrying with it the stirring revelation that Maria Eduarda is merely Madame MacGren, leaves Carlos with “o sentimento atordoado de uma coisa muito bela resplandecendo muito alto, e que caía de repente, se fazia em *pedaços na lama*, salpicando-o todo de *nódoas intoleráveis*. Não sofria: era simplesmente um assombro de todo o seu ser perante este fim *imundo* de um sonho divino” (483, italics mine). The image of dirt or filth as represented by references to mud is once again used for all that hinders Carlos and Maria’s love affair. The result is Carlos expressing, on behalf of himself and his beloved Maria, the soiled feeling provoked by Dâmaso: “sentia-se todo emporcalhado. [...] Recebera lama na face” (531). Although Ega was able to pull the article from publication at the last minute, the “prosa imunda” ignites Carlos’s fury against Dâmaso. He is deeply irrate that “sobre uma mulher, quieta, inofensiva no silêncio da sua casa, alguém ousasse tão brutalmente

arremessar esse lodo às mãos-cheias!” (532). The fact that this low journalist had initially accepted to publish such a damaging piece confirms Carlos’s indignation that spreads from Dâmaso to all Lisbon’s putrid society:

A sua indignação alargava-se, do foliculário que babara aquilo—até a sociedade que, na sua decomposição, produzira o foliculário. Decerto toda a cidade sofria a sua vérmina... Mas só Lisboa, só a horrível Lisboa, com o seu apodrecimento moral, o seu rebaixamento social, a perda inteira de bom senso, o desvio profundo do bom gosto, a sua pulhice e o seu calão, podia produzir uma ‘Corneta do Diabo’. (532)

This brief passage points to an abject environment symptomatic of Lisbon’s society and how Eça subtly uses the aesthetics of abjection to portray a wide-spread societal degeneracy.

### Humoring the Abject

As the above examples denote, long prior to the discovery of incest, an environment of abjection is already in place in *Os Maias*. However, what both underscores by contrast and lightens by comparison this pervasive theme of excrements et al. is the humor Eça interweaves into his depiction of the abject. Humor as a narrative strategy is a ploy to deflect from the grim prospects of abjection, as Eça punctuates the text with comical scenes that stand in stark contrast to the expression of the abject, while simultaneously drawing on these images. Such episodes resonate with Kristeva’s statement that “laughing is a way of placing or displacing abjection” (8). In Eça’s text this “placing and displacing” of abjection through laughter is at the center of the text, as comic scenes highlight incongruities and emphasize the difference between the real and the desired.

One of the most memorable scenes to portray this laughter/abjection dynamic is when Carlos, painfully trying to come to terms with the shocking news that Maria Eduarda is his sister, is repeatedly interrupted by Vilaça’s seemingly trivial and inopportune attempts to find his misplaced hat. After several disruptions, the tragic-comicality of the situation reaches its peak when

in utter frustration even Carlos joins in the hat-hunt: “Carlos conteve uma praga. Então Ega procurou também, por trás do sofá, no vão da janela. Carlos, desesperado, para findar, foi ver entre os cortinados da cama. E Vilaça, escarlate, aflito, esquadrinhava até a alcova do banho...” (642). The ingenuously constructed scene unavoidably leads to the bathroom, where else?

Another scene that foregrounds this abjection/laughter pair is a tangential episode that covers the indignity of an awkward situation with scatological humor. The infamous Dâmaso, who has fled from Lisbon to Italy because of a letter Ega published in the Republican newspaper “O Futuro”, apologizes to his uncle Sr. Guimarães for the claims Ega makes about him belonging to a family of good-for-nothing drunkards. Dâmaso justifies the delay in contacting his uncle by saying he has suffered “uma tremenda disenteria, que estou que me não tenho nas pernas. Isto por cima dos meus males morais!...” (593). This news causes Ega to burst out laughing and declare “Isso é extraordinário! Essa dignidade, essa disenteria...” (594), in a brilliant touch of characteristic Queirosian humor that places side by side Dâmaso’s claim of dignity and his dysentery. The excretory image of dysentery that points to the idea of Dâmaso’s physical ailment *malgré lui* combined with a complete lack of control depicts with great irony the constant theme of refuse and filth.

In other cases, dark humor is interwoven into the text as the abject is buried below the appearance of excitement and gaiety, which ultimately only add to this feeling of abjection. In particular, it is with laughter that Carlos reacts to Maria Eduarda telling him that he looks like her mother: “Carlos riu, encantado de uma parecença que os aproximava mais, e que o lisonjeava” (471). Immediately afterwards, faced with the sadness of their separation, he jokes again about this resemblance: “Carlos gracejou de novo sobre a sua parecença com a mãe dela” (471). According to Kristeva, the peculiar organization of abjection actually founds the signifying economy of our culture, and its characteristics of “rejecting, separating, repeating / abjecting” (15) are present in the symbolic in any cultural and intellectual activities relating to denial and negation, differentiation, setting up boundaries, etc. Dark humor comes into the picture at the blurring of these boundaries under the guise of misidentification. If abjection enables us to differentiate between clean and unclean, proper

and improper, inside and outside, the mask of humor complicates these divisions through a portrayal of outward happiness, whereas at the heart of the matter is the filth of the abject.

In Eça's text the link between bodily waste and the symbolism of the circumstances is clear: dirt represents the disordering of the system, the "fragility of the symbolic order" (Kristeva 70), or as Douglas states, "ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements" (35), as symbolically indicated by the many references to nausea and especially latrines through which filth is expelled. Beneath a superficial layer of happiness lies the essence of abjection. If Eça's text remains so rich and fascinating to this day, it is in part because of this tension between the seriousness and the humor, the mask that covers up the "dirt [that] is matter out of place" (Douglas 35).

### Incest and the Aesthetics of Abjection

When Ega becomes aware of Carlos' incestuous relationship, the Maia family's metaphorical dirty laundry is exposed: the knowledge of their incest is viewed as social filth, a relationship that must be either kept secret or denied. As referred to above through my reading of Kristeva's work, 'filth' is that which destabilizes a social or moral order, and in nineteenth-century Western society, incest is perceived as both societal and moral 'filth'. In *Os Maias*, this dirt is the unexpected turn of events that threatens Maria and Carlos's relationship and causes disorder. Or, in psychoanalytical terms, the revelation of Maria Eduarda's true identity destabilizes the symbolic order in which the protagonists' identities were anchored.

In this pivotal moment in Carlos's relationship with Maria Eduarda, the reader along with the protagonists finally understands more fully who he and his family are. The "disorientation" (Freeland 46) that guided the previous chapters of the text is now challenged by the knowledge that the Maias are no longer only represented by the two remaining men of the family, Afonso and Carlos. The text portrays an epic moment of abjection which brings Carlos to revolt against the being that gave him existence, his mother who fled and, in doing so, led to the misidentification of his sister. Carlos realizes that he has been living in a blissful state that, unbeknownst to him, had become abject:

the barriers and taboo that suddenly appear bring with them a traumatic sense of upheaval. Similar to what happens when an infant in the pre-subject / pre-symbolic realm believes in the imaginary union with its mother, Carlos's future had depended on his amorous union with Maria Eduarda, through whom, unknown to either of them, narcissistic primal identification with the removed mother was achieved.<sup>19</sup> This knowledge projects him into a typical abject double bind: the desire to pursue his relationship with Maria Eduarda and his repulsion of the sexual taboo. This is the pull of the abject dynamic, simultaneously repellent and seductive, and that which he seeks to overcome will continue to haunt him, ever remaining on the periphery of his awareness, even if they decide to flee Portugal and live together in a foreign country. Irrefutably, the knowledge of their kinship creates a whirlwind response that jeopardizes Carlos's relationship with Maria and calls their individual identities into question. The essence of abjection is the irreconcilable attraction/repulsion that stems from the first abjection of the maternal body and as such Carlos's experience harks back to the original moment of abjection. Kutzbach and Mueller detail this concept in their introductory remarks to *The Abject of desire*: "Every encounter with the abject is reminiscent of the initial abjection of the maternal body that the subject has to perform in order to acquire language and to establish the border between self and (m)other" (8). Although the mother is metaphorically present in the Carlos/Maria Eduarda relationship, in Eça's text it is no longer a physical pre-oedipal expulsion of the mother, but a physical repulsion of the (un)wanted relationship that must be terminated to keep his subjectivity intact. Carlos needs to expel his desire for Maria Eduarda, which translates to a denial of all previous feelings and the necessity to negate all sensual/sexual attraction. This thinking recalls Freud's writing in *Totem and Taboo* where he argues that civilization rests upon the obliteration of the impure incestuous relationships (4, and *passim*). In Kristeva, as illustrated in Eça's novel, the distinction is that the impurities can never be fully expelled, but remain present at the margins. Indeed as Grosz pointedly states, what is new in Kristeva's assertions is that the excluded impurities "hover at the borders of our existence, threatening the apparently settled unity of the subject with disruption and possible dissolution" (71).

Critics have focused on the incest motif read through a hindsight perspective, identifying narrative clues throughout the novel and symbolic representations of illicit love, such as those depicted in the paintings in the Ramalhete and the Toca. Yet the reader needs to look beyond the revelation of the siblings' past innocent incest to understand Eça's prolonged message of abjection. Indeed abjection is at its peak when Carlos knowingly returns to his sister, not once but twice. His incapacity to resist the repulsion of their newly perceived incestuous relationship, as dictated by society, is abjection at its purest carnal state, as indicated by the text. This is the quintessential portrait of abjection, the knowledge that disrupts Carlos's identity, his imagined future and his perceived past: in sum, the totality of his social order. Although he decides to return to Maria Eduarda alone, he is mistaken to believe he would be able to control his passion, "para enterrar o coração sob a razão, como sob uma fria e dura pedra" (653). Unable to free himself from what Freud would label the "incestuous fixations of libido" (17), he continues to give physical expression to his desire. Knowing that he has done wrong, that they have done wrong, Carlos experiences that which Freud refers to as a "taboo conscience" or, "after a taboo has been violated [...] a taboo sense of guilt" (67). Nonetheless this sense of propriety and guilt is not enough to curb his desire for Maria and despite all previous strong intentions, "de repente, Carlos enlaçou-a furiosamente, esmagando-a e sugando-a, numa paixão e num desespero que fez tremer todo o leito" (658).

If the first time that he knowingly sleeps with his sister can be considered a "miscalculation" of sorts, the second time he is overcome with abjection: physical, carnal repugnance, disgust, fear and horror transform his beloved Maria into a putrid, foul-smelling animal of pleasure, barbarous and Amazonian (666). At this point, no longer able to deceive himself into believing he could continue a physical relationship with his sister, Carlos examines different possible outcomes, and now realizes that if he were to flee Lisbon with Maria, knowing her to be his sister, he would sooner or later "se debater no indizível horror de um nojo físico" (667), a future of intolerable bitterness and pain.

Carlos's initial and subsequent reactions can be perceived as possible ways of treating anomalies as defined by Douglas: "Negatively, we can ignore, just not perceive them, or perceiving we can condemn" (38). Carlos's first

reaction is that of denial: “Não há Guimarães, não há papéis, não há documentos que me convençam!” (643). Douglas continues: “Positively we can deliberately confront the anomaly and try to create a new pattern of reality in which it has a place. It is not impossible for an individual to revise his own personal scheme of classifications. But no individual lives in isolation and his scheme will have been partly received from others” (38). The “new pattern of reality” that Carlos hopes for could only come from the grandfather as Carlos pleads with him for a logical explanation to contradict this shocking revelation: “O avô deve saber alguma coisa que nos tire desta aflição!” (644). Ega and Carlos (Ega perhaps even more lucidly than Carlos) know full well that the incest can no longer be considered a private matter, but must be seen as a cultural one.

This is the second occurrence in the text of a threatening “promiscuous broadcast of the private” (Brooks 12). As Douglas discusses, “culture, in the sense of the public, standardized values of a community, mediates the experience of individuals. [...] Cultural categories are public matters. They cannot so easily be subject to revision.” (39) By analogy, according to Eça’s text, society dictates that Carlos and Maria Eduarda’s sexual consumption, in which he becomes physically a part of her through intercourse, must be terminated.<sup>20</sup> In readings of abjection what is rejected is unclean, filthy or unfit since the obverse side of abjection is necessarily expulsion or separation which enables the removal from or the sieving off of the contamination and its correlates. As Kristeva argues, abjection “is a desire for separation, for becoming autonomous and also the feeling of an impossibility of doing so...” (136). In *Os Maias*, the knowledge of incest forces Carlos to face impossible, undesirable choices of separation, pushing him to even consider death (667).

### Conclusion: The Subject’s Lasting Fascination

As Carol Mastrangelo Bové writes on Kristeva’s use of the abject, it often stresses pain, violence and even death, and as such “may enable [Kristeva] more fully to expose and to try to cope with contemporary psychological dangers, steering clear of a utopian vision” (8). This applies most pertinently to Eça’s work in which a utopian vision of nineteenth-century Portuguese society is challenged, and through which the psychological, emotional and societal conflicts of the

Maia family mirror those of society at large. Just as Kristeva's writing "has been consistently committed to help free the subject from domination by sociopolitical hierarchies" (Bové 9), Eça's work foregrounds the limitations of Western society couched in Judeo-Christian beliefs as his protagonists confront prohibition and repression. As expressed by the main protagonist himself the day he finds out the true identity of Maria Eduarda, the fact that she is his sister does not mean that he loves her any less than he did the day before or any differently; nor does he want to (647).

Perhaps by virtue of Eça's skillful ability to break rules, transgress boundaries, and destabilize subjectivities, interest in his work continues strong to this day. For Kristeva, literature is abjection's "privileged signifier [...]." It "represents the ultimate coding of our crises, of our most intimate and most serious apocalypses. Hence its nocturnal power." (208) The dominant culture traditionally and systematically represses the emergence of elements of life that destabilize authority and order, and deconstruct received systems. They transport the reader to the abyss of surreality, to the uncanniness of humanity. As Kristeva states, "because it hence decks itself out in the sacred power of horror, literature may also involve not an ultimate resistance to but an unveiling of the object: an elaboration, a discharge, and a hollowing out of abjection through the Crisis of the Word" (208). It is this "Crisis of the Word" that gives form to the aesthetics of abjection in *Os Maias*. While uncovering the decay in modern patriarchal life, Eça also affirms the tenets of these norms and their persistence, oscillating between the possibilities of forbidden pleasure and social disease. Images of pollution and of societal impasse and taboo can be perceived as analogies for expressing a general trend in the social order. As Douglas suggests, "many ideas about sexual dangers are better interpreted as symbols of the relation between parts of society as mirroring designs of hierarchy or symmetry which apply in the larger social system" (3-4). This will cause Carlos to reject Portuguese society by flouting convention and the law, and embark on his foreign adventure, independent of others and self-seeking radical change in his own personal life.

At the same time, Eça's text illustrates and negotiates the perverse intersections of abjection where the social (symbolic) order is threatened by religion, morality and societal norms (and culture, as Lévi-Strauss would argue)



and acknowledges the impossibility due to the simultaneous absurdity and necessity of their existence. This is the fascination of *Os Maias*, embedded in its own “nocturnal power” with which abjection draws us back to the text so vigorously through the literary game that Eça plays. As Zola and others had done before him, Eça adheres to the Realist tradition to show a non-beautified world through a non-idealized form of art: and therein lie the novel’s interest and genius at the intersection of the *shocking* and *the ugly*. Or in other words, it might be our fascination with the “excrements” of latrine-literature that keeps us coming back. Indeed, chaste, reciprocal, ever-lasting love would not make an interesting plot for “episódios da vida romántica”. It never does.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This is apparent in readings such as the didactic explanation by Carlos Reis that shows schematically the increase in the importance of incest in the plot from chapters IV through XVII and in reverse proportions the decrease of narrative space dedicated to social customs. See *Introdução à leitura d’Os Maias* 84-87 and also Beatriz Berrini 31.

<sup>2</sup> Isabel Pires de Lima, in a series of rhetorical questions, poses the impossibility of explaining the text through any kind of logic. See *As máscaras do desengano* 201.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of Eça’s eclectic literary phase, following the last version of *O crime do padre Amaro*, as he becomes disillusioned with naturalism, see Carlos Reis, *Introdução* 13-17.

<sup>4</sup> Other critics, namely Isabel Pires de Lima in her seminal 1988 study and more recently Maria Manuela Lisboa in her stellar 2000 discussion of *Os Maias*, have turned to Kristeva to discuss the abjection of incest. The difference lies essentially in the way I push the concept further by applying it to the text as a whole.

<sup>5</sup> Many critics such as António Coimbra Martins, Carlos Reis, Maria Manuel Lisboa and Nelly Novaes Coelho, among others, have interpreted incest in *Os Maias* as symptomatic of Portugal’s national morality in decadence towards the end of the nineteenth century. See in particular Lisboa 47; Reis, *Introdução*, 164-67; Novaes Coelho 460; Coimbra Martins 274.

<sup>6</sup> See in particular the first three chapters of *Powers of Horror* 1-89.

<sup>7</sup> Many critics have read *Os Maias* through the classic tragedy paradigm. See in particular Pires de Lima 201, and her discussion of this topic in the works of Carlos Reis, Machado da Rosa and Óscar Lopes.

<sup>8</sup> This complex situation will not be developed in this article in relation to the engendering of abjection; however, the violence portrayed in this scene merits detailed development beyond the scope of this study and distinguishes the Carlos / Gouvarinho dynamic from the other circumstances listed.

<sup>9</sup> For a detailed reading of the narrative point of view, see Carlos Reis, *Estatuto e perspectivas* 126-27.

<sup>10</sup> Maria Manuela Lisboa contrasts carnal incest with a more moral, redeemable incest à la Shelley. See Lisboa 61.

<sup>11</sup> See Carlos Reis, *Estatuto e perspectivas* 119.

<sup>12</sup> This is not unusual in the novel that is riddled with similar relationships at which no one seems to bat an eye unless the concerned other finds out—as in the case of Ega and Raquel, where Ega is humiliated in the epic scene in which he is dressed as Mephistopheles and chased away by Raquel's husband from the masked ball that had originally been Ega's idea (269).

<sup>13</sup> The term "Hideaway" is the name the translator of *Os Maias* appropriately gives to the Toca in the English Penguin version: see *The Maias* 382.

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of the successive names of Maria Eduarda, see Freeland 99-101.

<sup>15</sup> This exclamation, "é extraordinário" parallels Maria's reaction not long before in the emblematic scene in which she first sees a portrait of Pedro de Maia in Ramalhete. With all sincerity she declares that, as bizarre as it may seem, Carlos reminds her of her mother: "é extraordinário, mas é verdade. Pareces-te com minha mãe!" (471).

<sup>16</sup> See in particular Chapter 2 "The Perverse Implantation" in Foucault, 36-49.

<sup>17</sup> We have only to recall the work of Alexander Jean Baptiste Parent-Duchâtelet, one of the most eminent hygienists of the nineteenth century and his monumental two-volume study *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris* (1832).

<sup>18</sup> I develop this aspect of *A cidade e as serras* in Part III "Amor no Water-Closet, Sex and Sewers" in Kathryn Bishop-Sanchez, "Untaming the Screw: Sex, Sewers and Obscenity in *A Cidade e as Serras*", in *Queirosiana. Estudos sobre Eça de Queirós e sua Geração* 13/14 (2002/2003): 121-49.

<sup>19</sup> For a very developed reading of the narcissistic triangle between Carlos, Maria and their mother, see Lisboa 65-95; and Rothwell 68-72.

<sup>20</sup> Writing as a literary critic, it bears emphasizing that I am drawing solely from Eça's text to formulate the statement that incest is an immoral practice in the fictive construction of nineteenth-century Portugal.

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