

## Apresentação

As versões dos contos de Machado de Assis aqui publicadas são o produto de um trabalho de pesquisa feito durante o ano de 2008, sob a minha coordenação, no Instituto de Letras da UFRGS. A intenção original era bastante modesta: fazer um levantamento das obras de Machado de Assis que já haviam sido vertidos para o inglês e escolher um corpus que a equipe pudesse verter e, depois, refletir a respeito, em especial no que diz respeito ao trabalho de tradução desse grande autor da literatura brasileira para o inglês. Evidentemente, Machado de Assis se revelou ser o autor mais vertido para o inglês e melhor conhecido, ao menos no meio acadêmico, em especial nos departamentos de estudos latino-americanos. No entanto, decidimos verter os contos do autor brasileiro por estes serem menos conhecidos e com menor número de versões. A revelação que se fez através da leitura minuciosa e subsequente versão de 20 contos é que Machado de Assis dominava como poucos autores brasileiros a arte do conto, ou o que Henry James chama de Art of Fiction, em seu ensaio sobre o assunto. No tempo em que as traduções foram feitas, também ocorreu uma reflexão sobre os recursos narrativos utilizados por Machado de Assis como contista, sua ironia e humor, e, sem dúvida, sua reflexão sobre os caminhos da humanidade. Enfim, toda essa riqueza teve de ser transposta para o inglês para que um leitor interessado na obra machadiana não perdesse nenhum detalhe da escrita desse maravilhoso autor nacional. Temos grande orgulho de publicar aqui uma pequena amostra de nosso trabalho.

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TRANSLATING MACHADO DE ASSIS: THE FORTUNETELLER AND  
THE SECRET CAUSE  
Rosalia Garcia

The task of translating Machado's stories reveals several interesting and disturbing questions. Machado's refinement and polish as a reader and writer cannot be overlooked in the translation of his stories, very much in the same way that happens with Chekhov and Henry James. One realizes that what a translator must be, first and foremost, is an attentive reader.

In the case of *A Cartomante*, or *The Fortunteller*<sup>i</sup>, though adultery is at the center of the story, what is actually being revealed goes beyond a mere love story. One must pay attention to the perspective of the narrator - an easygoing onlooker who invites readers to take the same stance. Moreover, the narrative's tone is light and easy. The flow of the story, however, leads the reader through growing uneasiness. Nevertheless, in general, the narrator avoids any direct judgment, leaving the reader to his own conclusions, but also does not display any certainty as to the intentions of the main characters.

This subtle see-saw between lightheartedness and absolute seduction in the depiction of the lovers' affair in *A Cartomante* (*The Fortuneteller*), for example, is a narrative strategy that must be a part of the translator's concern. As a close reader, the translator is aware of his role in the construction of the meaning of Machado's story, knowing that the nuanced form of the narration is an essential element in the author's stories and must be given special attention.

The intensity of reading Machado is even more evident in *A Causa Secreta*, or *The Secret Cause*. The story is challenging as a narrative and, thus, the feeling of having the floor taken away from beneath your feet is a constant, since there are several shifts in points of view.

Thus, Machado de Assis brings to the forefront the very demanding task present in translating his work. Reading his stories brings with it reflection and one can only hope that translating his stories can highlight this needed endeavour, .

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### The Fortuneteller

Hamlet remarks to Horatio that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in his philosophy. This was the same explanation fair Rita was presenting to young Camilo on a Friday in November, 1869, when he laughed at her for having gone to a fortuneteller the day before. The only difference was that she was doing it in other words.

“Laugh if you must. That’s just like men; they do not believe in anything. Well, I would like you to know that I did go, and she guessed the reason I was there even before I opened my mouth to tell her what it was. She had just started laying her cards on the table when she said: ‘You are in love with someone...’ I confessed I was, and she went on laying her cards, combining them and, in the end, stated that I was afraid that you had forgotten me, but that it was not true...”

“She was mistaken!” interrupted Camilo, laughing.

“Don’t say such a thing, Camilo. If you had any idea what I’ve been going through because of you. You know – I’ve told you. Don’t laugh at me...”

Camilo took her hands and gazed at her face with serious, intent eyes. He swore he loved her dearly, that her alarm was childish. In any case, if she had any misgivings, the best fortuneteller was he himself. Afterwards, he reproached her, warned her it was rash to go to these houses. Vilela might find out and then...

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“He’ll never know! I was very cautious when I entered the house.”

“Where is it?”

“Not far from here, on Guarda Velha Street. Nobody was on the street while I was there. Relax, I’m not reckless.”

Camilo laughed once again:

“Do you really believe in all that?” he asked her.

It was then, without knowing she was translating Hamlet to the vernacular, that she told him she believed there were many mysterious and true things in this world. If he did not believe it, nothing could be done, but the truth was that the fortuneteller had guessed it all. And what’s more, the proof was that now she was calm and content.

I think he was on the verge of saying something, but checked himself. He did not want to take away her illusions. As a child, and even later on, he too had been superstitious, with a whole arsenal of beliefs that his mother had instilled in him and which, by the time he turned twenty, had all disappeared. On the day when all of that parasitic foliage dropped, leaving only the trunk of religion, since he had received both forms of teaching from his mother, he wrapped them in the same doubt and, soon after, in the same total denial. Camilo did not believe in anything. And why was that? He could not say, he did not have any arguments, he simply denied it all. No, I am wrong, for denial is still a form of affirmation, and he did not formulate his disbelief. In face of the mystery, he was content to shrug and walk away.

They parted in high spirits, he even more than she. Rita was certain she was loved; Camilo was not only certain, but saw her shudder and take risks for him, running off to fortunetellers. And, though he scolded her, he could not avoid feeling flattered. Their meeting spot was on old Barbonos Street where lived a friend of Rita’s from her hometown. Rita walked down Mangueiras Street

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towards Botafogo where she lived. Camilo strolled down Guarda Velha Street, glancing fleetingly at the fortuneteller's house.

Vilela, Camilo and Rita, three names, one adventure and no explanation for its origin. Let's get down to it, then. The first two were childhood friends. Vilela had decided to become a magistrate, Camilo became a civil servant, against the wishes his father, who had wanted him to be a doctor; his father had died and Camilo chose not to be anything, until the day his mother arranged a position in the public service for him. At the beginning of 1869, Vilela returned from the countryside, where he had married a beautiful and brainless lady. He gave up the magistracy and set up a legal practice instead. Camilo found a house near Botafogo for him and promptly paid him a visit.

"Oh, it's you?" exclaimed Rita, offering her hand. "You cannot imagine what a friend you have in my husband. He is always speaking of you."

Camilo and Vilela looked at each other with affection. They were indeed true friends.

Later on, Camilo confessed to himself that Vilela's wife did not fail to live up to his letters. Her gestures were indeed graceful and vivacious, her eyes warm, her mouth fine and inquisitive. At thirty, she was a bit older than the two men: Vilela was twenty-nine; Camilo, twenty-six. However, Vilela's solemn mien made him look older than his wife, whereas Camilo was naive in both morals and habits. He lacked both the effect of time and those crystal spectacles that Nature places in the crib of some, to advance their years. He had neither experience nor intuition.

The three became close. Closeness brought intimacy. A while later, Camilo's mother died and at this true disaster, the other two showed him great fondness. Vilela took care of the funeral, the prayers and the will; Rita took care of his heart, and no one could have done it better.

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How they went from this to love, he never knew. The truth of the matter was that he loved spending time with her. She was his moral nurse, almost a sister, but, mainly, she was a woman and a lovely one at that. *Odor di femmina*: that is what he breathed from her and around her and incorporated into himself. They read the same books, went to the theater and to outings together. Camilo taught her how to play checkers and chess and they would play in the evenings – she played poorly, and he, to please her, a bit less poorly. So much for the things. But there were gestures, and Rita's stubborn eyes would often search for his, checking his reaction before her own husband's, the cold hands, extraordinary attitudes. One day, on his birthday, he received from Vilela a richly decorated cane as a gift. From Rita there was a mere card with a common penciled greeting. It was then that he read into his own heart – he could not take his eyes off the card. Platitudes; but certain platitudes are sublime, or at least delicious. The old street carriage in which you rode, for the first time, with the woman you love, both concealed from view, is as good as Apollo's chariot. Such is man, such are the things that surround him.

Camilo sincerely wanted to flee, but it was too late. Rita, like a serpent, wound herself around him, enveloped him totally, snapped his bones in a spasm and dropped her venom in his mouth. He was dazed and vanquished. Shame, frights, remorse, desire, he felt it all at once, but the battle was short and the victory delirious. Farewell, scruples! It did not take long for the shoe to mould to the foot and there they both went, down the road, arm in arm, stepping carefree over grass and pebbles, without suffering a thing beyond a bit of longing when they were apart. Vilela's trust and esteem continued the same.

One day, however, Camilo received an anonymous letter calling him immoral and deceitful, saying that the affair was known to all. Camilo was frightened and, to avert suspicions, he began to limit his visits to Vilela's house. Vilela noticed his absences. Camilo responded that the reason was a frivolous

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and youthful passion. Candor led to craftiness. His absences became more frequent and his visits ceased completely. Perhaps there was a share of self-esteem in all this, the intention of decreasing the husband's kindness so the disloyalty of the act would be less taxing.

It was around this time that Rita, suspicious and fearful, rushed to the fortuneteller to consult her about the real reasons behind Camilo's acts. As we have seen, the fortuneteller restored her confidence, and the young man chided her for having made the visit. A few weeks went by and Camilo received two or three more anonymous letters. They were so passionate that they could not be the warnings of virtue, but the spite of some suitor. This was what Rita thought, expressing in somewhat ill-formed words the following idea: virtue is lazy and greedy, it does not waste time nor paper. Only self-interest is active and prodigal.

This did nothing to ease Camilo's concern. He feared that the anonymous letter writer would go to Vilela: then catastrophe would certainly strike. Rita agreed that it was possible.

"Well," she said, "I'll take these letters and compare the handwriting with those I receive. If any are the same, I'll keep them and then tear them up..."

None appeared. Soon after, Vilela began to seem secretive, saying very little, as if he were suspicious. Rita quickly told Camilo and they mused about the reasons. Her opinion was that Camilo should start visiting them again, start to probe her husband, perhaps hear from him some secret, confidential matter. Camilo disagreed: to show up after so many months would be to confirm the suspicion or revelation. They should be careful, putting off their encounters for a few more weeks. They decided about the ways they would keep in touch, if it became necessary, and parted in tears.

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The next day, at the office, Camilo received a note from Vilela: “Come at once to our house, I must speak to you without delay.” It was past midday. Camilo left immediately. When he reached the street he thought how it would have been more natural if Vilela had called him to his office; why to his house? Everything indicated that it was a delicate matter, and the handwriting, unless he imagined it, seemed tremulous. He thought of all these things in light of the news he had received the day before.

“Come at once to our house, I must speak to you without delay,” Camilo repeated, his eyes on the note.

He imagined a hint of drama: Rita subdued and tearful, Vilela, angry, picking up his pen and writing the note, certain that Camilo would come, ready to kill him. Camilo shuddered, he was frightened. Then, he smiled ironically. In any case, the idea of retreating was repugnant to him. He walked on. On the way he remembered to stop by his house: there might be a note from Rita explaining everything. He found nothing and no one. He returned to the street. The idea that they had been unmasked seemed increasingly plausible. An anonymous letter to Vilela was natural, perhaps from the very person who had threatened him before. Maybe Vilela knew everything by now. The very interruption of his visits, for no apparent reason, with a futile pretext, confirmed the rest.

Camilo walked on, restless and nervous. He did not read the note again, but the words were ingrained in his mind; worse, they were being whispered into his ears, in Vilela’s own voice: “Come at once to our house, I must speak to you without delay.” When they were said like this, in the man’s voice, they sounded mysterious and threatening. Come at once, for what? It was nearly one o’clock in the afternoon. His commotion grew steadily every minute. He imagined what was about to happen to him so often that he began to believe it and even to see it. He was positively terrified. He started to think he should



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take along a weapon, considering that if nothing happened, nothing would be lost, but it was a useful precaution. Soon after, he rejected the idea and went on, walking more swiftly, towards Largo do Carioca to take a cab. There he got into one and told the driver to move at a good trot.

“The sooner the better,” he thought. “I can’t go on like this...”

Even the pace of the horse deepened his commotion. Time flew, soon he would be face to face with danger. As they reached the end of Guarda Velha the cab had to stop. The street was blocked by a cart that had toppled over. Camilo estimated the obstacle and decided to wait. After five minutes had gone by, he noticed that to the left of the cab was the fortuneteller’s house, the one Rita had once gone to, and never had he so wished to believe in the outcome of the cards. He gazed at the house, saw that the shutters were drawn, while all the others were open and filled with people curiously observing the incident in the street. One could say that it was the house of indifferent Fate.

Camilo leaned back in the cab to block his view. His turmoil was great, quite extraordinary, and from the depths of his moral layers emerged phantoms of another time, the old beliefs, the ancient superstitions. The driver suggested they go back to the other street and take a different path. Camilo replied that they should wait. He leaned forward to observe the house... He then made an incredulous gesture at the idea of listening to the fortuneteller, an idea that flew overhead at a distance, a great distance, on vast grey wings. It disappeared, reappeared and fell back into the shadows of his brain. It moved its wings again, closer, circling in on him... In the street, men yelled as they righted the cart:

“There now! Push! Go! Go!”

In a short while the obstacle would be removed. Camilo closed his eyes and thought about something else, but the words in Vilela’s note whispered in his ears: “Come at once...” And he saw the contortions of the

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drama and shivered. The house watched him. His legs wanted to get out and enter the house... Camilo found himself facing a long opaque veil... he quickly thought of how inexplicable so many things were. His mother's voice telling him an assortment of extraordinary stories, and the very phrase of the prince of Denmark echoed inside him: "There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy." What would he lose if...?

Before he realized it he was on the sidewalk, at the door. He told the driver to wait and quickly passed into the hallway and went up the stairs. It was dimly lit, the steps worn, the rail sticky, but he neither saw nor felt a thing. He climbed up and knocked. No one answered and he thought of going back down, but it was too late. Curiosity beat in his veins, his temples throbbed. He knocked once, twice, three times. A woman came to the door: it was the fortuneteller. Camilo said he wanted to consult her. She invited him inside. They went to the attic, up a flight of stairs that was even worse than the first, and darker. At the top there was a small room, ill-lit by a window which looked over the rooftops in the back. Old rubbish, darkened walls, an atmosphere of poverty that actually gave the place the prestige of decadence.

The fortuneteller told him to take a seat at the table and seated herself opposite him, with her back towards the window: what little light there was fell fully on Camilo's face. She opened a drawer and took out a deck of long, worn cards. While she quickly shuffled them, she regarded him, not openly but askance. She was a woman of forty, Italian, dark and thin, with large, sharp, stealthy eyes. She placed three cards on the table and said:

"First, let's see what brought you here. You are under the effect of a great fright..."

In awe, Camilo nodded.

"And you want to know," she continued, "if something will happen or not..."

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“To me and to her,” he explained, excitedly.

The fortuneteller did not smile, she merely told him to wait. Again she quickly picked up the deck and shuffled it with her long, thin fingers and slovenly nails. She shuffled thoroughly, cut the deck once, twice, three times and only then placed some cards on the table. Camilo’s eyes were on her, curious and anxious.

“The cards tell me that...”

Camilo leaned forward to absorb each and every one of her words. She then declared that he should not be afraid of anything. Nothing would happen to either of them. The third party knew nothing of what was going on. Nevertheless, more caution was needed, envy and resentment boiled. She told him of the love that bonded them, of Rita’s beauty... Camilo was amazed. The fortuneteller finished, collected her cards and put them back into the drawer.

“You have restored my peace of mind,” he said, reaching out and holding the fortuneteller’s hand over the table.

She stood up and laughed.

“Go,” she said, “go, ragazzo innamorato...”

Standing, she touched his forehead with her index finger. Camilo shuddered as if her hand were that of the Sybil herself and stood up as well. The fortuneteller went to the bureau, on which sat a plate of raisins. She picked up a handful and started to eat them, showing off two rows of teeth that gave the lie to her nails. In this common gesture the woman displayed a most peculiar air. Camilo, anxious to leave, did not know how to pay her, was unsure of the price.

“Raisins cost money,” he finally said, taking out his wallet. “How many do you want to order?”

“Ask your own heart,” she replied.

Camilo took out a ten mil-réis bill and gave it to her. The fortuneteller’s eyes flashed. The usual price was two.

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“I can tell you love her very much... And that is good, she loves you as well. Go, don't be concerned. Watch the stairs, they are dark. Take your hat...”

The fortuneteller had put the money in her pocket and went down with him, speaking with a slight accent. Camilo said goodbye at the door and went down the stairs that led to the street while the fortuneteller, pleased with the payment, went back up singing a barcarolle. Camilo found the car waiting; the street was free. He climbed in and was off at a fast trot.

Everything seemed much brighter to him now, all other things had quite a different appearance, the sky was clear and faces were cheerful. He even laughed at his fears, which he called puerile. He recalled the terms in which Vilela's note was written and recognized they were intimate and familiar. Why had he ever seen a threat in them? He remembered also that they were urgent and chided himself for having taken so long: it might be a serious, a very serious matter.

“Let's go, let's hurry,” he kept repeating to the driver.

As an explanation to give his friend for his delay, he came up with some small excuse. It seems he also began to formulate a plan to use this incident and return to his old diligence. Along with his plans, the fortuneteller's words echoed in his soul. She had, in fact, divined the purpose of his visit, his state of mind, the existence of a third party: why would it be hard for her to divine the rest? The unknown present is as good as the future. And so, slowly but steadily, the fellow's old beliefs were rekindled, and the mystery drove him on with claws of iron. At times, he wanted to laugh, and he did laugh at himself, somewhat ashamed. But, the woman, the cards, the dry, assertive words, the exhortation – “Go, go, ragazzo innamorato” – and, in the end, from afar, the barcarolle as a farewell, slow and graceful. These were the recent elements that, along with the old, built up a new and vivid faith.

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The truth is that his heart beat, joyful and impatient, dwelling on the happy moments of the past and on those that were yet to come. As he drove by the Gloria church, Camilo gazed at the sea, his eyes reaching far away to the infinite embrace of water and sky, which brought on the feeling of a long, long, interminable future.

In a short while he arrived at Vilela's door. He got out, pushed open the iron gate and walked in. The house was silent. He walked up the six stone steps and barely had time to knock, the door opened and Vilela appeared.

"I'm so sorry, I couldn't make it earlier. What's the trouble?"

Vilela did not reply. His features were distorted. He made a sign and they went to an inner parlor. As he walked in, Camilo could not stifle a cry of terror: at the back, on a settee, was Rita, dead and bloodied. Vilela took him by the collar and, with two shots from a revolver, threw him dead to the floor.

### The Secret Cause

Standing, Garcia stared and clicked his nails; Fortunato, in the rocking chair, gazed up at the ceiling; Maria Luisa, near the window, was finishing some needlework. Five minutes had gone by without any of them saying a word. They had spoken about the weather, which was excellent; of Catumbi, where the Fortunato couple lived, and of a clinic, which will be explained later. Since the three characters in this story are now long dead and buried, it is time to tell the events without pretense.

They had also spoken of some other issue, besides the three already mentioned, something so horrendous and serious that it left little enthusiasm for the weather, the neighborhood or the clinic. The whole conversation on that point had been uncomfortable. At this exact moment, Maria Luisa's fingers still seem tremulous, while Garcia's face bears an expression of

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severity that is very unlike him. In truth, what had occurred was of such an order that to understand it one must go back to the origins of the affair.

Garcia had graduated from Medical School the previous year, 1861. In 1860, still a student, he had met Fortunato for the first time at the entrance of the Santa Casa Hospital; he was entering just as the other was leaving. The figure impressed him, yet he would have forgotten all about the other man were it not for the second meeting a few days later. Garcia lived on Dom Manoel Street. One of his few diversions was to go the Saint Januário theater, which was nearby, between this street and the beach. He would go once or twice a month, and never saw more than forty people. Only the most adventurous dared to turn their steps to that corner of the city. One evening, seated in the arena, Fortunato appeared and sat in the next row.

The play was a melodrama, grossly patched together, charged with imprecations and remorse, but Fortunato listened with special interest. Throughout the scenes of suffering, his attention doubled, his eyes slipped avidly from one character to the next, which made the student suspect that the play stirred personal reminiscences in his neighbor. At the end of the drama came a farce, but Fortunato did not wait for it and left; Garcia followed him. Fortunato walked down Cotovelo Alley and São José Street to Carioca Place. He walked slowly, head down, stopping once in a while to poke a sleeping dog with his cane; the dog would start whining and he would move on. At Carioca Place he got into a cab and headed towards Constitution Square. Garcia saw nothing more of him and went home.

Several weeks went by. One night at nine o'clock, Garcia was at home when he heard the rumor of voices on the stairway. He went down from the attic where he lived to the first floor where there lived a man employed at the arsenal. This man was being helped up the stairs, covered in blood. His black servant quickly opened the door; the man moaned, the voices were confusing,

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the light was dim. Having laid the wounded man on the bed, Garcia said they should call a doctor.

“There is one on the way,” someone said.

Garcia looked; it was the same man from the Santa Casa and the theater. He thought he might be a relative or friend of the wounded man, but he soon rejected the possibility when the man asked if the fellow had a family or a close friend. The black servant said he did not, and then took charge of everything, asked strangers to leave, paid the carriers and gave the first orders. When he found out that Garcia was a neighbor and a medical student, he asked him to stay and help the doctor. Then he told him what had happened.

“It was a band of thugs. I was coming from the Moura barracks where I had gone to see a cousin of mine when I heard a terrible racket, and then I saw a crowd. Apparently, they had also wounded another fellow who was passing by, but he slipped down one of the alleys. I only saw this gentleman who was crossing the street at the precise moment in which one of the ruffians brushed past and stabbed him with a knife. He did not fall immediately; he told me where he lived and, since it was close by, I thought it best to bring him here.”

“Do you know him?” asked Garcia.

“No, I have never seen him before. Who is he?”

“He is a good man, works at the arsenal. His name is Gouvêa.”

“I don’t know him.”

The doctor and the police officer soon arrived. The wound was dressed and information collected. The stranger said his name was Fortunato Gomes da Silveira, of independent means, single, living in Catumbi. The wound was declared to be serious. Throughout the dressing, which was assisted by the student, Fortunato helped as if he were a servant, holding the basin, the candle, the bandages, without disturbing a thing, looking coldly at the wounded man,

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who moaned loudly. When all was done, he spoke in private with the doctor, accompanied him to the landing and repeated to the officer his willingness to help in the investigations. The two left and he and the student remained in the room.

Garcia was dumbfounded. He looked at Fortunato and saw him sit down calmly, stretch out his legs, place his hands in his trouser pockets and stare at the wounded man. His eyes were clear, the color of lead, they moved slowly and his expression was hard, dry and cold. His face was thin and pale, with a narrow strip of beard below his chin, from one temple to the other, short, red and fine. He would be around forty. Once in a while, he would turn to the student and ask a question about the wounded man, but would then turn back and look at him while the other gave his answer. The student's feeling was one of both repulsion and curiosity. He could not deny he was witnessing a rare act of dedication and, if he were as detached as he seemed, there was nothing to do but accept the human heart as a deep well of mysteries.

Fortunato left a little before one. He returned on the following days, but the man soon recovered from his wounds and, before he was quite better, Fortunato disappeared without telling the beneficiary where he lived. It was the student who told him the name, street and number:

"I will thank him for his great act of charity as soon as I am well enough to leave the house," said the convalescent.

He took off for Catumbi six days later. Uncomfortable, Fortunato let him in, listened to his thankful words with impatience, answered wearily and sat tapping the tassels of his robe on his knees. Gouvêa, seated in front of him in silence, smoothed out his hat, raising his eyes from time to time, finding nothing else to say. After ten minutes, he excused himself and left.

"Watch out for thugs!" said the owner of the house, laughing.



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The poor devil left mortified, humiliated, painfully chewing over the contempt, doing all he could to forget, justify or forgive, so his heart would retain only the memory of the good deed, but it was all in vain. Resentment, a new and exclusive guest lodged itself and forced the good deed out in such a way that the wretch need do no more than climb with little effort into the man's head and take refuge there as a simple idea. Thus, the benefactor himself suggested the feeling of ingratitude to the man.

All of this amazed Garcia. The young man possessed, in his core, the faculty of deciphering men, of decomposing characters. He had the love of analysis and the gift, which he believed supreme, of penetrating many moral layers until he could touch on the secrets of a body. Stung with curiosity, he thought of visiting the man at Catumbi, but remembered that he had never been invited to do so. He needed at least an excuse, but he could think of nothing.

A while later, having graduated and residing on Matacavalos Street, near Conde Street, he saw Fortunato in a tram. He ran into him several more times, and the frequency brought with it familiarity. One day, Fortunato invited him to visit his house in Catumbi, which was nearby.

“Did you know I am married?”

“I did not.”

“I was married four months ago, but one could say it was four days. Come join us for dinner on Sunday.”

“Sunday?”

“Do not attempt to make excuses, I accept no excuses. Sunday it is.”

Garcia went over on Sunday. Fortunato offered him a good dinner, good cigars and good conversation, in the company of his wife, who was interesting. Fortunato's demeanor had not changed: his eyes were the same tin plates, hard and cold, his other features were no more attractive than before. The

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obsequies, however, if they did nothing to redeem nature, were able to compensate for it somewhat, and this was no small matter. Maria Luisa was in possession of both charms, of person and manner. She was slim, elegant, her eyes were sweet and submissive, she was twenty-five and did not look older than nineteen. On his second visit, Garcia noticed that there was between the pair a certain dissonance of character, almost no moral affinity and, on the part of the wife in relation to her husband, manners which went beyond respect but were restricted to resignation and fear. One day, while the three were together, Garcia asked Maria Luisa if she knew the circumstances in which he had met her husband.

“No,” the girl answered.

“You will hear of a wonderful deed.”

“It is not worth it,” interrupted Fortunato.

“You, madam, shall judge if it is worth telling,” the doctor insisted.

He proceeded to tell the story of Dom Manoel Street. The girl listened in astonishment. Without realizing, she reached out her hand and held her husband’s wrist, smiling and thankful, as if she had just found his heart. Fortunato shrugged, but did not listen with indifference. At the end, he himself told them of the visit the wounded man had paid him, with all the details of the figure, the gestures, the bumbling words and silences, in sum, a lark. And he laughed heartily as he told it. It was not the laughter of duplicity. Duplicity is evasive, oblique. His laughter was jovial and frank.

“Singular fellow!” thought Garcia.

Maria Luisa was desolate at her husband’s mockery, but the doctor revived her spirit, referring once more to Fortunato’s dedication and his rare qualities as a nurse. He had been such a good nurse, he concluded, that if he ever decided to open a hospital some day, he would invite him to work there.

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“Really?” Fortunato asked.

“Really, what?”

“Shall we open a clinic?”

“No, not really, I was only joking.”

“We could do something, and for you, at the start of your career, it would be excellent. And indeed I have a house which is about to vacate, and it would do.”

Garcia refused that day and the next, but the idea had fixed itself in the other man’s mind and it was no longer possible to go back. In reality, it would be a good beginning for him and it could turn out to be a good business for both. He finally accepted after a few more days, which was a disappointment for Maria Luisa. A frail and nervous creature, she suffered at the mere idea of her husband coming into contact with human illness, but she did not dare contradict him and bowed her head. The plan was soon made and put into practice. The truth is that Fortunato never cured anything, not then, not after. Once the clinic was opened, Fortunato became the administrator and the nurses’ supervisor. He examined everything, dealt with everything, merchandise and broths, drugs and invoices.

Garcia could then observe that the dedication to the wounded man on Dom Manoel Street was no fortuitous case, but was firmly grounded in this man’s very nature. He saw him serve others as no servant would. He would flinch before nothing, knew no illness that was too harrowing or repulsive, was always ready for everything, at any time of day or night. All were amazed and applauded. Fortunato studied and followed the surgeries, and no other cauterized as he did.

“I have great faith in cauterization,” he would say.

The communion of interests tightened their bonds of friendship. Garcia became a familiar presence in the household, dining there almost every

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day, and there observing the character and life of Maria Luisa, whose moral solitude was clear. And her solitude seemed to double her charms. Garcia began to feel that something stirred within him when she appeared, when she spoke, worked in silence at the window, or played some sad songs on the piano. Softly, softly, love worked its way into his heart. When he realized it, he wanted to push it away so that there would be no other bond between him and Fortunato besides friendship, but he could not. All he could do was lock it in. Maria Luisa understood both feelings, the affection and the silence, but gave nothing away.

At the beginning of October, another incident occurred which revealed to the doctor even more about the young woman's situation. Fortunato had started to study anatomy and physiology, and occupied his free time in tearing open and poisoning cats and dogs. Since the screeches of the animals disturbed the patients, he moved the laboratory to his home, and his wife, of a nervous temperament, had to bear it all. One day, however, she could take it no longer and went to the doctor and asked him to get her husband to stop his experiments, as if it were his own idea.

“But you yourself...”

Maria Luisa answered with a smile:

“He will naturally think I am a child. What I would like is for you, as a doctor, to tell him that it makes me ill, and believe me, it does...”

Garcia promptly saw to it that the other man ended those studies. If he kept them up in some other place, no one knew, but it was not impossible. Maria Luisa thanked the doctor, on her behalf and on behalf of the animals whose suffering she could not bear. She coughed from time to time; Garcia asked her if she felt unwell. She responded that not at all.

“Let me take your pulse.”

“I'm fine.”

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She did not offer him her wrist and left the room. Garcia was apprehensive. He imagined she might well be ill, that he should observe her and warn her husband in time.

Two days later – exactly on the day in which we find ourselves now – Garcia went to their house for dinner. In the parlor he was told Fortunato was in his study and he went in that direction, he came to the door at the exact moment Maria Luisa was leaving in distress.

“What is it?” he asked her.

“The rat! The rat!” the girl exclaimed, moving away.

Garcia remembered that the day before Fortunato had complained of a rat that had stolen an important document; but he never expected what he then saw. He saw Fortunato seated at his desk, in the middle of the room, upon which he had placed a dish with some wine spirits. The liquid was in flames. Between the thumb and index finger of his left hand he held a string from which a rat hung by its tail. In his right hand he held a pair of scissors. As Garcia entered, Fortunato was cutting off one of the rat’s paws; he then lowered the poor creature to the flame, quickly, so as not to kill it, and was about to do the same with the third paw, having already cut off the first. Garcia stood horrified.

“Kill it once and for all!” he said.

“In a minute.”

And, with a peculiar smile, reflecting a satisfied soul, something that translated the intimate delight of supreme sensations, Fortunato cut off the rat’s third paw and, for the third time, moved it towards the flame. The miserable creature contorted itself, squealing, bloodied and burnt, but did not die. Garcia looked away, and then looked back, making to stretch out his hand to stop the suffering from going on, but stopped, because the devilish man was frightening, with all that radiant serenity of countenance. There was still one

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more paw; Fortunato cut it off very slowly, watching the scissors closely; the paw fell and he looked at the half-dead rat. As he lowered it for the fourth time to the flame, he did so even more quickly to save, if he could, some last scraps of life.

Facing him, Garcia managed to overcome the repulsion he felt at the scene and stared at the man's face. Neither anger nor hatred, only an immense pleasure, quiet and profound, as another person would feel at hearing a beautiful sonata or seeing a divine statue, something close to pure aesthetic feeling. It seemed, and it was true, that Fortunato had completely forgotten he was there. Hence, he could not be pretending, and it must all be real. The flame was dying out, perhaps the rat still had a remnant of life in it, a shadow of a shadow; Fortunato took the opportunity to cut off its snout and, for the last time, lower the flesh to the flame. Finally, he dropped the corpse on the plate and pushed away all that mixture of scorched flesh and blood.

When he stood up, he suddenly saw the doctor and was startled. He then showed how angry he was at the animal which had gnawed at his paper, but his fury was evidently pretense.

"He punishes without anger," thought the doctor, "merely out of a need to feel the pleasure that only someone else's pain can give: that is the man's secret."

Fortunato exaggerated the importance of the document, the loss it had caused, the loss of time, certainly, but time was now very precious to him. Garcia only listened and said nothing, believing none of it. He remembered all the man's actions, the serious and the slight: for all he found the same explanation. It all came down to the same transposition of the keys of sensitivity, dilettantism sui generis, Caligula in a minor key.

When Maria Luisa returned to the study after a while, her husband went to her, laughing, held her hands and spoke softly:

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“Crybaby!”

And turning to the doctor:

“Can you believe she almost fainted?”

Maria Luisa defended her fright, she said her nerves were bad, she was a woman. Then, she sat by the window with her needles and wool, her fingers still tremulous as we saw at the beginning of the story. You might remember that, after having spoken of other issues, the three remained in silence, the husband seated gazing up at the ceiling, the doctor clicking his nails. A while later they went in to dine, but it was not a happy dinner. Maria Luisa mused and coughed; the doctor asked himself if she were not being exposed to some excess or other at this man’s side. It was only a possibility, but love changed possibility into certainty: he feared for her and decided to keep an eye on both.

She coughed and coughed, and in no time the illness unmasked itself. It was consumption, that old insatiable lady that sucks out all of life until the only thing left is a heap of bones. Fortunato took the news badly; he truly loved his wife, in his own way, he was used to her and it cost him a great deal to lose her. He spared nothing: doctors, drugs, fresh air, every resource and every palliative. But it was all in vain. The disease was fatal.

During those last days, witnessing the extreme suffering of the girl, the husband’s character subdued any other affection. He never left her side, resting his dull, cold gaze on the slow and painful degradation of life, he drank each and every affliction of that beautiful creature, now thin and transparent, devoured by fever and overtaken by death. In his coarse egotism, hungry for sensations, he spared himself not a single minute of suffering, nor paid for them with one single tear, public or private. Only after she breathed her last did he look stunned. Coming to, he saw he was once again alone.

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In the evening, after a relative of Maria Luisa's, who had helped her to die, retired for the evening, Fortunato and Garcia remained in the parlor, keeping vigil over the body, both lost in thought. The husband was himself weary and the doctor told him to rest for a while.

“Rest, sleep for an hour or two. I'll do the same afterwards.”

Fortunato left and lay down on the sofa in the next room, and soon fell asleep. Twenty minutes later he awoke, wanted to sleep once more, dozed for a few minutes until he got up and returned to the parlor. He tiptoed so he would not awaken the relative who slept nearby. When he reached the door, he stopped in amazement.

Garcia had approached the body, lifted the veil and gazed for a few moments at the dead features. Then, as if death had sublimated everything, he leaned down and kissed her forehead. It was at this moment that Fortunato came to the door. He stopped in amazement: it could not possibly be the kiss of a friend, it was possibly the epilogue of a tale of adultery. He was not jealous, mind you; nature had composed him neither for jealousy nor envy, but it had instilled vanity, which is no less a captive of resentment.

He stared, fascinated, biting his lip.

However, Garcia, leaning over to kiss the body once more, could no longer contain himself. The kiss broke out into sobs and his eyes could no longer hold back the tears that fell abundantly, tears of a silent love and of irreparable despair. Fortunato, at the door where he stood, calmly savored this explosion of moral pain that was long, very long, deliciously long.



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## RELATO SOBRE A TRADUÇÃO DE “CONTO DE ESCOLA” E “UM ESQUELETO” DE MACHADO DE ASSIS

Amanda Guizzo Zampieri

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Com relação à tradução de dois importantes contos de Machado de Assis, no ano de 2008, pude perceber o quão árdua é a tarefa de transpor uma idéia originalmente em português (do Brasil) para a língua inglesa. Além disso, precisei levar em consideração que, embora o texto literário estivesse na língua que considero como minha língua nativa, há diversos elementos que me causavam “estranhamento” em decorrência do contexto histórico e cultural em que os textos foram produzidos.

Em primeiro lugar, “Conto de Escola”, publicado originalmente em 1846 (na coletânea de contos chamada “Várias Histórias”), traduzido em conjunto com a colega Cybele Alle, trouxe-nos uma série de dificuldades com relação aos costumes educacionais da época. Talvez o principal desafio tenha sido a busca de uma solução para a questão do castigo com a vara de marmelo. Também tivemos que lidar com os pronomes de tratamento (“seu Pilar...”, “seu mestre...”) e, por fim, com as variações utilizadas pelos meninos do conto das moedas por eles disputadas.

Em seguida, com a empreitada da tradução de “Um Esqueleto”, publicado originalmente em 1875 (no “Jornal das Famílias”) o desafio mostrou-se um pouco diferente: neste conto, uma cena inicial se desvela diante dos leitores e, um de seus protagonista se ergue e conta-nos uma história. Portanto, nesse caso, não temos apenas as diferenças culturais, mas a questão do distanciamento do narrador, do personagem principal e dos personagens de sua narrativa. Um

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labirinto de vozes e de pontos-de-vista mesclado com cenários horripilantes e com a aparição de um esqueleto.

Além disso, o conto em questão trata de uma atmosfera característica dos romances góticos, contando, inclusive, com referências aos contos de um dos autores clássicos do (sub)gênero: E.T.A. Hoffman – mais um conjunto de referências que mereceu pesquisa e afinco no vocabulário!

Como na época em que a tradução me fora delegada eu era apenas uma novata na faculdade de Letras da UFRGS, não havia me ocorrido que Machado e os demais escritores e escritoras brasileiras fizessem uso desses elementos góticos para criar uma tradição brasileira desse tipo de romance. Cabe a nós, estudantes de literatura, resgatar esses pontos e reinterpretar muitos dos nossos textos literários!

Reflexão sobre as versões propostas para o inglês de dois contos de

Machado de Assis:

“Conto de Escola” e “A Chinela Turca”

Cybele Margareth de Oliveira Alle

Traduzir Machado é uma tarefa bastante desafiadora, principalmente quando consideramos a questão de como fazer jus a sua reputação e estilística em face de barreiras linguísticas e culturais. Nesse sentido, por tratar-se da exposição de um autor canônico consagrado na literatura brasileira, traduzir qualquer obra machadiana implica, a meu ver, considerável responsabilidade.

Assim, na tentativa de amenizar tal fato, procurei, inicialmente, ler sobre sua obra, ambientar-me com os elementos que a compõem e, só então, iniciar o processo tradutório de “O Conto de Escola” e “A Chinela Turca”. Tenho de confessar que, nessa fase, os trabalhos de alguns autores – principalmente daqueles que dissertavam sobre os aspectos estilísticos machadianos, e em

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especial o do renomado linguista Mattoso Câmara, *Ensaio Machadianos* – foram de suma importância para munir-me de informações que tornaram a tomada de decisões menos dolorosa no decorrer do processo.

Digo que as decisões se tornaram “menos” dolorosas porque acredito que traduzir significa, em grande parte, ler e entender para, depois, reescrever. E ler Machado de Assis, mesmo para um leitor brasileiro do século XXI, nem sempre é tarefa fácil e indolor. Por várias vezes, a busca de informações em dicionários e na internet – para tentar recuperar, em português, o significado de alguma expressão ou palavra usada por Machado no século XIX – mostrou-se imprescindível.

Dessa maneira, o distanciamento da linguagem da época foi o primeiro desafio que se apresentou, fazendo com que surgisse a necessidade de recorrer a uma tradução intralingual de certas palavras e expressões antes da busca, na língua de chegada, de um equivalente mais próximo capaz de causar o mesmo estranhamento percebido pelo leitor brasileiro. Para efeito de ilustração, fizeram parte desse repertório palavras tais como “suetos”, “boceta de rapé” e “nênia”, entre outras, que, segundo o *Aulete*, significam, respectivamente “folga”, “caixa de tabaco” e “canto fúnebre”.

Todavia, devido a fatores linguísticos, é óbvio que transpor o mesmo estranhamento percebido na língua de partida para língua de chegada não foi possível em todos os casos aplicáveis, e esse fator constituiu mais um desafio a ser vencido no processo tradutório. A solução encontrada foi a adoção de um sistema de compensação que possibilitasse a transferência desse fator, mesmo quando ele não estivesse presente no texto de partida, proporcionando, assim, ao leitor anglófono um pouco do sabor lexical machadiano. Essa tática foi aplicada, por exemplo, no caso de “dous suetos” (“Contos de Escola”), que, ao ser traduzido para o inglês por “two small holidays” perdeu a característica existente na língua de partida. Porém, foi compensada em outras circunstâncias em que

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houve a elevação do registro lexical na tradução, tais como em: “toma lá, dá cá”, traduzido por “quid pro quo” em vez de uma opção mais coloquial como “give and take” e “disfarçadamente”, traduzido por “covertly”.

Além dessas dificuldades, outras, de caráter estrutural, se fizeram presentes. Entre elas destacam-se a falta de equivalência de tempos verbais entre as duas línguas e a impossibilidade de resgatar, no inglês, o aspecto estilístico da sintaxe por vezes invertida de Machado em frases como “[...] tinha jus o major a todos os respeitos [...]” e “Lopo Alves cuidava pôr por obra uma invenção [...]” na tradução de “A Chinela Turca”.

Como se isso não bastasse, esse sentimento de perda foi potencializado por não conseguir oferecer ao leitor anglófono a leitura plurissignificativa propiciada pelos nomes dados por Machado aos personagens de “O Conto de Escola”, que não receberam tradução na versão para o inglês: Pilar, o narrador (forte, sólido), Curvelo, o colega maléfico (curvo, torto) e Policarpo, o mestre (Poli/vários, carpo/frutos).

Por causa dessas impossibilidades, ao finalizar a tradução da obra machadiana, senti-me assombrada pelas escolhas feitas e por certa insatisfação atrelada ao fato de não ter conseguido dar conta da magnitude que tem a obra do autor. Mas, aparentemente, não sou a única, pois, como apontado por Gregory Rabassa, reconhecido tradutor da obra de Machado para o inglês (1989, p.7): “It is my feeling that a translation is never finished, that it is open and could go on to infinity [...] Since we are not writing our own material, we are still unsure whether or not the word we have used is the best one, either for meaning or for sound or for ever so many other reasons.”

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### A School Story

The school was on Costa Street, in a small, two-story wooden schoolhouse. The year was 1840. On that day – a Monday in May – I allowed myself to linger on Princesa Street, wondering where I would play that morning. I hesitated between St. Diogo hill and Sant’Anna field, which was not then the park of today, a gentleman’s construction, but a rustic place, more or less infinite, strewn with washerwomen, wild grass and loose donkeys. Hill or field? That was the question.

Suddenly, I said to myself that the best option was the school. And I headed to school. Here comes the reason.

A week before I had given myself two small holidays and, being caught, received the payoff from my father’s hand, who gave me a lashing with a quince stick. His beatings hurt for a long time.

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He was an old Army Arsenal employee, harsh and intolerant. He dreamed of a great commercial position for me, and was anxious to see me involved with the elements of trade – reading, writing and arithmetic – so as to thrust me into a clerk’s position. He quoted me the names of capitalists who had started off behind the counter. Well, it was the memory of that last punishment that took me to school that morning. I was not a virtuous boy.

I climbed the stairs cautiously, so as not to be heard by the schoolmaster, and arrived in time; he came in three or four minutes later. He entered the classroom, at his usual slow gait, wearing cordovan sandals, his linen jacket, washed and faded, stiff white trousers and a big saggy collar. His name was Policarpo and he was about fifty, or more. Once seated, he pulled out the snuff box and the red handkerchief from his jacket, and placed them in the drawer; then he cast his eyes over the room. The boys, who had been standing throughout his entrance, sat back down. Everything was in order; the work began.

“Mister Pilar, I need to talk to you,” the master’s son whispered to me. The little child was called Raimundo. He was weak, hard-working, slow-witted. It took Raimundo two hours to retain things that for the others would take only thirty or fifty minutes; he overcame with time what he could not do quickly with his brain. Added to that fact was an enormous fear of his father. He was a thin, pale, sickly child, seldom cheerful. He arrived at school after his father and left before him. The master was harsher with him than with us.

“What do you want?”

“Wait,” he answered with a trembling voice.

The writing lesson began. It is hard for me to say I was one of the most advanced students at school; but I was. I will not add that I was one of the smartest, due to an understandable scruple and its excellent stylistic effect, but I have no other conviction. Note that I was neither pale nor sickly: I was well

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colored and had muscles of iron. In the writing lesson, for example, I always finished before the others, and left myself to draw noses on paper or nick them in the desk, an occupation with neither nobility nor spirituality, but innocent in any case. The same thing happened that day; as soon as I finished the lesson, I started sketching the master's nose, portraying him in five or six different attitudes, of which I recall the interrogative, the admiring, the doubtful and the cogitative. I did not have all these names in mind, poor primary school pupil that I was; but, instinctively, I gave them these expressions. The others were finishing up; I had no other option but to finish as well, turn my writing in and get back to my seat.

Frankly, I regretted having come. Now that I was locked inside, I longed to walk outside, and recalled the field and the hill, thought about the other truants, like Chico Shingle, Americo, Staircase Carlos, the cream of the neighborhood and of mankind. To my ultimate despair, I saw through the school window, in the bright blue sky, above Livramento hill, a paper kite, high and wide, tied to an enormous string, swelling out in the wind, a superb thing. And I, at school, sitting, legs together, with the reading book and the grammar on my knees.

“I was a fool for coming,” I said to Raimundo.

“Don't say that,” he murmured.

I looked at him; he had grown paler. Then he reminded me once again he wanted to ask me for something, and I asked him what it was. Raimundo trembled again, and, quickly, asked me to wait a while; it was something private.

“Mister Pilar...” he murmured a few minutes later.

“What?”

“You...”

“You what?”

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He laid his eyes on his father, and then on some of the other boys. One of them, Curvelo, was looking at him, suspiciously, and Raimundo, making me aware of the circumstance, asked me to wait a few minutes longer. I confess that my curiosity was starting to itch. I looked at Curvelo and noticed he seemed very attentive; it could have been any vague curiosity, a natural indiscretion; but there could also have been something between them. This Curvelo was a little mischievous. He was eleven, older than us.

What could Raimundo want from me? I remained uneasy, restless; I whispered to him, insistently, to tell me what it was, because nobody was watching either him or me. Maybe in the afternoon...

“Not in the afternoon,” he interrupted me. “It can’t be in the afternoon.”

“Right now, then.”

“Father is watching.”

Indeed the master was staring at us. As he was sterner with his son, his eyes often sought him out, so as to browbeat the child even more. But we were also roguish; we stuck our noses in the books, and continued reading. Eventually he got tired and took the day’s papers, three or four, and read them slowly, digesting the ideas and the passions. Don’t forget we were at the end of the Regency, and there was great public ferment. Policarpo undoubtedly supported some party, but I could never be sure which. For us, the worst he could do was the paddle. And there it was, hanging on the window sill, to the right, with its five evil eyes. He had only to raise his hand, take it off and wield it, with the usual force, which was not small. And so, it is possible that sometimes political passions dominated him to the point of saving us from one punishment or another. That day, at least, it seemed that he read the news with great interest; he raised his eyes from time to time, or took a pinch of snuff, but soon turned back to the newspapers, and read compulsively.



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After a while – ten or twelve minutes – Raimundo put his hand into his trouser pocket and looked at me.

“Do you know what I have here?”

“No.”

“A silver coin my mother gave me.”

“Today?”

“No, the other day, for my birthday...”

“A real silver coin?”

“Yes, a real one.”

He pulled it out slowly, and showed it to me from afar. It was a coin from the time of the king, I think it was twelve vinténs or two tostões, I can't remember; but it was a coin, and that coin made my heart race. Raimundo turned his pale eyes toward me; then, he asked me if I wanted it for myself. I replied that he was teasing me, but he swore he was not.

“But would you part with it?”

“Mother can give me another one. She has lots of them which my grandfather left her, in a little box; some of them are gold. Do you want this one?”

My answer was to covertly stretch my hand out after looking at the master's desk. Raimundo pulled his hand back, and his mouth sketched an awkward gesture, which was an attempt at a smile.

After that, he proposed a deal, a trade; he would give me the coin, I would explain a part of the syntax lesson to him. He couldn't retain anything from the book, and was in fear of his father. And he sealed the proposal by rubbing the little silver coin against his knees...

I had an odd feeling. It was not that I possessed an idea of virtue worthy of an adult; nor that I could not easily employ one or two childish lies. We both knew how to deceive the master. The novelty was in the terms of the

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proposal, in the exchange of lesson for money, a blatant purchase, no middleman, quid pro quo; that was the cause of the odd feeling. I looked at him, aimlessly, unable to say a thing.

It is understandable that the lesson was difficult, and that Raimundo, who hadn't learned it, tried what seemed to be a useful manner to escape his father's punishment. If he had asked it as a favor, he would have gotten it the same way, like the other times, but it seems that it was the memory of other times, the fear that my will would be lax or tired, and he would not learn as he wanted – and it might be possible that on another occasion I had taught him poorly – this seems to have been the cause of the proposal. The poor devil was counting on the favor, but he wanted to assure its effectiveness, so he resorted to the coin that his mother had given him and that he had kept as a relic or a toy; he took it and started rubbing it against his knees, within my sight, as a temptation... It was really beautiful, fine, white, so white; and to me, who only carried coppers in my pocket, when I carried anything, an ugly copper, coarse, tarnished...

I didn't want to accept it, but it was hard to refuse. I looked at the master, who kept on reading with such interest that the snuff dripped from his nose. "Quick, take it," said the son softly. And the silver coin sparkled between his fingers, as if it were a diamond... Really, if the master didn't see anything, what was the problem? And he couldn't see anything; he was glued to the newspaper, reading with passion, with indignation...

"Take it, take it."

I cast my eyes over the classroom, and met Curvelo's, fixed on us. I told Raimundo to wait. It seemed like the other was watching us, so I dissembled; but in a little while I laid my eyes on him again, and (how desire makes fools of us!) saw nothing more in him. So, I took heart.

"Give it to me..."

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Raimundo gave me the silver coin, furtively; I put it into my trouser pocket, with an excitement I cannot describe. Here it was, mine, rubbing against my leg. All that remained was to render the service and teach the lesson, which I did not tarry to do, nor did I do it poorly, at least not consciously; I handed over the explanation on a piece of paper which he received cautiously, with full attention. It was clear that he was putting in five or six times the effort just to learn a little nothing; but as long as he escaped punishment, everything would be fine.

All of a sudden, I looked at Curvelo and trembled; he had his eyes on us, with what seemed to me an evil smile. I dissembled; but in a little while, looking back at him, I found him in the same position, with the same expression, but also starting to shift in his seat, restless. I smiled at him, and he didn't smile back; on the contrary, he furrowed his brow, which gave him a menacing look. My heart raced.

“We need to be very careful,” I said to Raimundo.

“Tell me this one thing,” he murmured.

I signaled for him to stay quiet; but he insisted, and the coin, there in my pocket, reminded me of the contract made. I taught him what it was, concealing my actions; then, I looked back at

Curvelo, who seemed to me even more restless, and the smile, evil before, was now even worse.

Needless to say my face was on fire, anxious for the class to be over; but neither did the clock tick like other times, nor did the master care for the classroom; he was reading the newspapers, item by item, punctuating them with exclamations, gestures of the shoulders, and one or two raps on the desk. And out there, in the blue sky, over the hill, the same eternal kite, moving from one side to the other, as if inviting me to go outside to it. I imagined myself, with the books and the slate under the mango tree, and the silver coin in my

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trouser pocket, which I would not give to anyone, not even if someone sawed me in half; I would keep it at home, telling my mother I had found it on the street.

To keep it from escaping from me, I kept touching it, rubbing my fingers against the coat of arms, almost reading the inscription by touch, longing to glance at it.

“Ah! Mister Pilar!” roared the master with a voice of thunder.

I started as if woken from a dream, and quickly stood up. I found the master looking at me, grim-faced, newspapers scattered, and Curvelo standing by his desk. He seemed to have figured it all out.

“Come here!” the master roared.

I went and stood before him. He buried his sharp pair of eyes into my conscience, then called his son. The whole school had stopped; no one was reading, no one moved at all. Although I did not take my eyes off the master, I felt everyone’s curiosity and the fear in the air.

“So, you receive money to teach lessons to others?” said Policarpo.

“I...”

“Hand me the coin this classmate of yours gave you!” he demanded.

I didn’t obey right away, but I could not deny anything. I was still shaking a great deal.

Policarpo shouted again to give him the coin, and I resisted no more. I put my hand in the pocket, slowly, pulled it out and handed it over. He examined one side, then the other, puffing with rage; then stretched out his arm and threw the coin into the street. He spoke some very harsh words, that both I and his son had just performed an act that was unworthy, undignified, low,

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villainous, and, to serve as correction and example to all, we were to be punished.

At that moment, he took up the paddle.

“Forgive me Master...” I sobbed.

“There is no forgiveness! Give me your hand! Give it to me! Come on! Shameless! Give me your hand!”

“But, Master...”

“You are just making it worse!”

I stretched out my right hand, then the left, and received the blows one on top of the other, until they added up to twelve, and left my palms red and swollen. His son’s turn was next, and the procedure was the same, nothing was spared, two, four, eight twelve blows. That finished, he lectured us again. He called us shameless, insolent, and swore that, if we repeated the business, we would be chastised so severely we would remember it forever. And he exclaimed: Filthy! Ruffians!

Spineless!

As for myself, I could not lift my head. I did not dare look at anyone, and felt all eyes on us. I shrank into the seat, sobbing, lashed by the master’s scolding words. The room gasped in terror; I can state that no one would repeat the same deal that day. I believe that even Curvelo was overwhelmed with fear. I did not look at him right away, but deep inside I had sworn to break his nose on the street as soon as we left school, as certain as three and two are five.

After a while I looked at him; he was also looking at me, but immediately turned the other way, and I think his face grew pale. He pulled himself together and started reading aloud; he was afraid. He started shifting his position, fidgeting for no reason, scratching his knees, his nose. It was possible

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he regretted turning us in; and, in fact, why turn us in? How were we taking anything from him?

“You will pay me back! No quarter!” I said to myself.

The time had come to leave, and we left; he walked ahead of us, hurrying, and I didn't want to fight right there, on Costa Street, near the school; it had to be on St. Joaquim Street. However, when

I reached the corner, he was gone; he had probably hidden in one of the galleries or stores; I went into a pharmacy, peeked inside other shops, asked some people about him. No one knew his whereabouts. In the afternoon, he missed class.

I didn't say anything at home, of course; but I had to lie to my mother to explain the swollen hands, saying I hadn't learned the day's lesson. I slept that night, damning both boys to hell, both the informant and the one with the coin. And I dreamed about the coin; I dreamed that, as I returned to school the following day, I found it on the street, and picked it up, without fear or scruple...

In the morning, I woke up early. The idea of going to look for the coin made me dress quickly. It was a splendid day, a May day, magnificent sun, mild air, not to mention the new trousers my mother had given me, which, incidentally, were yellow. All this, and the silver coin... I left the house, as if it were to ascend to the throne of Jerusalem. I rushed so that no one could arrive at school before me; but even so, I did not go so quickly as to crease my trousers. I couldn't, they were so beautiful! I admired them, fleeing from encounters, from the garbage on the street...

On the street, I ran into a company of riflemen, drums up front, rumbling. I couldn't stand still. The soldiers marched at a fast pace, in step, left, right, to the sound of the drums; they came, passed me and marched on. I felt an itching in my feet and had an urge to go after them. I already told you: the day

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was beautiful, and then the drum... I looked one way and then the other; in the end, I don't know how it happened, I started marching to the sound of the drum, and I believe I was singing a tune like: The Rat in the coat... I skipped school, followed the riflemen, then took Saúde Street and ended the morning on Gamboa Beach. I came home with my trousers crumpled, with neither a silver coin in my pocket nor resentment in my soul. And, nonetheless, the silver coin was beautiful, and it was Raimundo and Curvelo who first gave me knowledge – one about corruption, the other about informing; but that damned drum...

## A Skeleton

### I

They were ten or twelve young men, talking about arts, letters and politics. Every once in a while, an anecdote served to spice up the seriousness of the conversation. Bless me, it seems they even made a few puns.

The sea crashed near us on the solitary beach... prose meditation style. But none of the twelve guests was interested in the ocean. Not in the night either, ugly and threatening rain. Had it rained, it is most likely that nobody would have noticed, so interested were they in discussing different political systems, or the merits of an artist or a writer, or simply laughing at a timely quip.

In the middle of the night, one of the guests happened to make a comment about the beauty of the German language. Another guest agreed with the first about the advantages of the tongue, saying he had learned it from Doctor Belem.

“Did you not know Dr. Belem?” he asked.

“No,” they all answered.

“He was an extremely singular man. During those days when he was teaching me German, he wore a greatcoat, which reached almost to his ankles, and an extremely wide-brimmed Chilean hat.”

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“He must have been a sight,” remarked one of the young men.  
“Was he an educated man?”

“In every way. He had written a novel and a book of theology and had discovered a planet...”

“This man?”

“This man lived in Minas. He came to the Capital to have the two books printed, but could not find a publisher, so he decided to tear up the manuscripts. As for the planet, he communicated the news to the French Academy of Sciences; he mailed a letter and waited for an answer; it never came because the letter ended up in the city of Goias.”

A member of the party grinned maliciously to the others, as if saying it was too much misfortune all together. However, the narrator’s attitude took away his will to laugh. Alberto (that was the narrator’s name) had his eyes on the floor, the gloomy eyes of one recalling some extinct happiness. He let out a sigh, after some moments of vague and speechless contemplation, and continued:

“Forgive me that moment of silence; I cannot remember that man without a tear struggling to burst from my eyes. Maybe he was an eccentric, maybe not. Certainly the man was not entirely good, but he was my friend; I will not say he was the only, but he was the greatest I ever had.”

Naturally, Alberto’s words changed the audience’s state of mind. The narrator remained in silence for some minutes. Suddenly, he shook his head as if trying to cast out some troublesome memories from his past, and said:

“To show you the eccentricity of Dr. Belem, I need only tell you the story of the skeleton.”

The word skeleton piqued the party’s curiosity; a novelist pricked up his ears so as not to miss a word; all waited anxiously for the skeleton of Dr. Belem. It had just sounded midnight; and the night, as I said, was dark; the sea



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crashed ominously against the beach. They were in full Hoffmann. Alberto started the narrative.

## II

Dr. Belem was a tall, thin man; his hair was grey and falling to his shoulders; standing, he was straight as a shotgun; walking, he hunched slightly. Although his gaze was often kind and tender, it had sinister flashes, and sometimes, when he meditated, he had the eyes of a dead man.

He appeared to be sixty years-old, but was in fact no more than fifty. Study had worn him down, as had sorrow, as he said on the few times he spoke to me about his past, and I was the only one to whom he spoke of these matters. One could count three or four deep wrinkles on his face, whose skin was cold as marble and pale as a corpse.

One day, right after my German lesson, I asked him had he never been married. The doctor smiled without looking at me. I did not insist; I regretted having asked the question.

“I was married once,” he said, and after some time, “and in three months I will again be able to say: I am married.”

“Are you getting married?”

“I am.”

“To whom?”

“To Dona Marcelina.”

Dona Marcelina was a widow from Ouro Preto, a lady of twenty-six. She was not beautiful, but she was very pleasant, and had a certain fortune, but not as much as the doctor, whose wealth amounted to some sixty contos.

Until then, I had not known he was going to marry; nobody had suspected or spoken of such a thing.

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“I am going to get married,” the doctor proceeded, “only because you mentioned it. Until five minutes ago, I had no intention of doing such a thing. But your question makes me think that I really do need a partner; I cast the eyes of memory over all the possible brides, but no one seemed to me more plausible than this. In three months, you will be present at our wedding. Promise me?”

“I promise,” I replied with an incredulous smile.

“She is no beauty.”

“But she is very appealing, no doubt,” I readily answered.

“Appealing, educated and widowed. It is my idea that every man should marry a widow.”

“Who would marry maidens, then?”

“Those who are not men,” answered the old man, “like yourself and most of humankind; but men, creatures of my temper, but...”

The doctor halted, as if hesitating to confide further, then returned to talking about the widow, Marcelina, and praised her qualities enthusiastically.

“She is not as beautiful as my first wife,” he said. “Oh! That woman... You have never seen her?”

“Never.”

“That is impossible.”

“But it is true. I believe I met you as a widower.”

“Well; but I have never showed her to you? Come see her...”

He stood up; I stood up as well. We were sitting near the door; he took me to an inner office. I confess that I went both curious and scared. Although I was his friend and had tokens of his friendship, he commanded so much fear in the people, and was really so remarkable, that I could not avoid some form of fright.

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At the end of the office was a piece of furniture covered with green cloth; the doctor removed the cloth and I screamed.

It was a glass cupboard, and inside it, a skeleton. Even today, despite the years which have passed, and the changes to my spirit, I cannot remember that scene without terror.

“This is my wife,” said Doctor Belem smiling. “She is beautiful, don’t you think? It’s in the bones, as you can see. Of so much beauty, so much grace, so much wonder that charmed me and others long ago, what now remains of her? Look, my young friend; such is the last countenance of the human race.”

That said, Dr. Belem covered the cupboard with the cloth and we left the office. I didn’t know what to say, so astonished had that spectacle left me.

We went back to our seats near the door, and stayed some time without saying a word to one another. The doctor looked at the floor; I looked at him. His lips were trembling, and from time to time his face twitched. A slave came to talk to him; the doctor snapped out of his lethargic state.

When we were left alone he seemed another person; he talked to me, smiling and cheerful, with a volubility unusual for him.

“Very well, if I am happy in this marriage,” he said, “I will owe it to you. It was you who gave me the idea! And you did well, because I feel younger already. How do you find the bridegroom?”

Saying this, Doctor Belem stood up and twirled around, holding the tails of his coat, which he never failed to wear, save only when he retired at night.

“Does the bridegroom seem to you an able man?” he said.

“Without a doubt,” I replied.

“She shall think likewise. You will see, my friend, that I will have everybody at my feet, and more than one man will envy my fortune. What

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is more, more than one woman will envy her fortune. Why not? There are not many such bridegrooms as I.”

I said nothing, and the doctor kept talking this way for twenty minutes. The afternoon was gone, and the idea of death and the skeleton which was just a few steps from us, and even more so the strange manners which my good master displayed, on that day more than any other; all this made me bid him farewell and return home.

The doctor smiled to himself a sinister smile which he sometimes had, but did not insist that I stay. I went home sad and perplexed; perplexed by what I had seen; sad at the responsibility he cast onto me regarding his marriage.

However, I considered that the doctor’s words might be realized neither promptly nor remotely. Maybe he will never get married, or even think about it. What certainty could he have of marrying the widow Marcelina within three months? Who knows, I thought, maybe he only said it to mock me?

This idea burrowed into my spirit. On the following day I got up convinced that the doctor really just wanted to pass the time and take the opportunity to show me his wife’s skeleton.

Naturally, I said to myself, he loved her greatly, and that is why he still preserves her. Clearly he will not marry another woman; nor find anyone willing to marry him, so popular is the superstition that he is a werewolf, or at least a close friend of the Devil... He! My good, merciful master!

With these ideas in mind I went to the doctor’s home the next morning. I found him having lunch alone, as always, attended by a slave as old as he.

“Come in, Alberto,” he said when he saw me at the door. “Would you like to have lunch?”

“Yes, I would.”

“João, a plate.”

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We had a joyful meal; the doctor seemed to me just as he generally was, speaking about serious or frivolous things, mixing philosophical reflections with quips, a youthful anecdote with a quote from Virgil.

At the end of lunch, he turned to his wedding once more.

“But do you truly think of it...?” I asked him.

“Why not? It depends only on her; but I am almost sure she will not refuse. Can you introduce me to her?”

“At your service.”

On the following day, Doctor Belem was presented at the house of the widow Marcelina and received an amiable welcome.

“Will he really marry her?” I asked myself, surprised by what I saw, because, besides the great age difference between them, and his eccentric manners, there was another candidate to the beautiful widow’s hand, lieutenant Soares.

Neither the widow nor the lieutenant could imagine Doctor Belem’s intentions; from that you can imagine Dona Marcelina’s astonishment when, eight days later, the master asked her if she would marry him.

“Neither you nor the other,” said the widow; “I have vowed never to marry again.”

“Why?” asked the doctor coolly.

“Because I loved my husband very much.”

“That does not prevent you from loving the second,” the candidate observed, smiling.

And after a moment of silence:

“I shall not insist,” he said, “Nor shall I make a scene. I truly love you, but it is a philosopher’s love, as I think all love should be. Nevertheless, let me have hope; I shall ask your hand twice more. If by my last request I have achieved nothing, consent at least that I remain your friend.”

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### III

Dr. Belem followed his schedule to the letter. A month later he asked the widow in marriage again, and heard the same refusal, though perhaps less decisive than before. He waited six weeks, then repeated the proposal.

“Did she accept?” I asked when I saw him leaving Dona Marcelina’s house.

“Why should she decline? Didn’t I tell you that I would get married within three months?”

“But are you a soothsayer, a magician?”

The doctor burst into laughter, the kind he saved for when he wanted to mock someone or something. On that occasion, he was mocking me. It seems I didn’t react well, because the doctor immediately became serious and embraced me, saying:

“Oh, my friend, don’t mistrust me! Did we just meet today?”

The tenderness with which he said these words had made him a different man. He no longer had strange shades in his gaze, nor the saccadée voice (let’s use the French term, our own escapes me for the moment) which was his characteristic way of speaking. I embraced him too, and we talked about the wedding and the bride.

The doctor was cheerful; he shook my hands lots of times, thanking me for the idea I had given him; he made plans for the future. He had ideas of coming to the capital, right after the wedding; he hazarded the idea of going on to Europe; but he had barely established the idea, when he was already thinking of never leaving Minas, of dying there, he said, between its hills.

“I can see you are become the perfect bridegroom,” I said; “you have all the signs of a man about to get married.”

“Do I seem so?”

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“You are.”

“In fact, I truly like the bride,” he said very seriously; “I may die before her; but it is more probable that she will die first. In that case, I hereby swear that her skeleton will keep company with the other.”

The idea of the skeleton made me tremble. The doctor, saying these words, stared at the ground, deeply absorbed. From that moment the conversation was less cheerful than at first. I left there unpleasantly impressed.

The wedding soon became a reality. Nobody wanted to believe their eyes. Everyone admired the courage (that was the word they used) of the widow Marcelina, who did not shy away from that great sacrifice.

It was no sacrifice. The young lady seemed cheerful and gay. The congratulations she received were ironic, but she accepted them with pleasure and in earnest. Lieutenant Soares did not congratulate her; he was furious; he wrote her a note saying everything that can be said in such circumstances.

The wedding was held right after the deadline set by Dr. Belem in the conversation which I mentioned at the beginning. It was a great event in the capital of Minas. For eight days, there was no topic except the impossible affair; eventually, the novelty passed and nobody discussed the couple anymore.

I went to dine with them a week later. Marcelina seemed happier than ever; Doctor Belem no less so. He even seemed a new man. The woman had started to influence him, one of the first consequences being the absence of his singular coat. The doctor consented to dress less eccentrically.

“Dress me as you will,” he said to his wife; “What you can never do is change my soul. Never.”

“Neither do I want to.”

“Nor could you.”

It seemed they were destined to enjoy eternal happiness. At the end of another month, I went there and found her sad.

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“Oh!” I said to myself, “Lover’s quarrels soon begin.”

The doctor was as always. We read and commented Faust, after our own manner. That day, Doctor Belem seemed sharper and more ingenious than ever. I noticed, however, a singular aspiration: the desire to look like Mephistopheles.

I confess here that I could not but laugh.

“Doctor,” I said, “I believe you are abusing my friendship to mock me.”

“Is that so?”

“You take advantage of your reputation as an eccentric to make me believe you to be the Devil...”

When he heard the last word, the doctor crossed himself, and that was the best statement he could have given me to say that he did not want to be mistaken for the aforementioned character. He smiled kindly, took a pinch and said:

“You delude yourself, my friend, when you attribute this idea to me, as you do when you think Mephistopheles to be what you say.”

“And now this!...”

“I will tell you my reasons some other time. Now let us have dinner.”

“Thank you, but I must dine with my brother-in-law. But, if you will, I would stay here for a while, reading your Faust.”

The doctor did not object; I was almost a member of the household. He left for the dining room. I read for twenty minutes, at the end of which I closed the book and went to take my leave of Doctor Belem and his wife.

I walked down a hallway which led into the dining room. I could hear the motion of plates, but the couple did not utter a word.



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“The lover’s quarrel lingers,” I thought.

I kept walking... But what was my surprise when I came to the door? The doctor had his back to the door, and couldn’t see me. The woman had her eyes on the plate. Between them, sitting on a chair, was the skeleton. I stopped, terrified and trembling. What could it mean? I lost myself in suppositions; I took a step forward to speak to the doctor, but didn’t dare; I returned from whence I came, picked up my hat, and ran down the street.

At my brother-in-law’s home, everyone noticed the signs of fear that still marked my face. They asked me if I had seen a spirit from the other world. Smiling, I answered that I had; but told them nothing of what I had just witnessed.

For three days I did not go to the doctor’s house. It was fear, not of the skeleton, but of the master of the house, who seemed to me an evil man or a mad man. Nonetheless, it burned in me to know the reason for the skeleton’s presence at the dinner table. Dona Marcelina could tell me everything; but how could I ask her about it, if the doctor was almost always at home?

On the third day, Doctor Belem came to my house.

“Three days!” he said, “For three days I have not had the fortune of seeing you. Where have you been? Are you ill pleased with us?”

“I have been unwell,” I answered, not knowing what to say.

“And you didn’t send word, you ingrate! You are no longer my friend.”

The tenderness of his words dispelled my scruples. It was remarkable how that man, who by certain habits, manners and ideas, and even by physical countenance, frightened so many people and gave rise to the fancy of popular superstition, remarkable, I repeat, how sometimes he spoke to me with an incomparable sweetness and a tone of patriarchal benevolence.

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We spoke briefly and I felt obliged to accompany him home. The woman still seemed sad, but a little less so than the other time. He treated her with great tenderness and consideration, and if she did not respond cheerfully, at least she spoke with the same sweetness.

#### IV

In the middle of the conversation, we were told that dinner was served.

“Now come and dine with us,” he said.

“I can’t,” I stammered, “I have to go...”

“You don’t have to go anywhere,” interrupted the doctor. “It seems that you want to run away from me. Marcelina, ask Dr. Alberto to dine with us.”

Dona Marcelina repeated her husband’s request, but with visible uneasiness. I was about to refuse again, but the doctor took the precaution of holding me firmly by the arm and refusal was impossible.

“Let me at least offer my arm to your wife,” I said.

“Of course.”

I gave my arm to Dona Marcelina, who trembled. The doctor went ahead. I inclined my mouth to the poor lady’s ear and whispered:

“What is the mystery?”

Dona Marcelina trembled again and silenced me with a gesture.

We arrived at the dining room.

Despite having witnessed the scene the other day, I could not resist the impression made by the sight of the skeleton, there in the same chair where I had seen it, with its arms on the table.

It was horrible.

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“I have already introduced you to my first wife,” the doctor said, “you are old friends.”

We sat at the table; the skeleton between him and Dona Marcelina; I remained beside the latter. Until that point I was unable to say a word; it was, however, natural that I express my astonishment.

“Doctor,” I said, “I respect your customs, but will you not give an explanation for this?”

“This what?” he said.

I gestured towards the skeleton.

“Ah!...” replied the doctor; “A natural custom; I have dinner with my two wives.”

“Admit at least that it is an original practice.”

“Would you have me copy others?”

“No, but piety towards the dead...”

I dared to speak that way because, besides striking me as desecration, the woman’s melancholy seemed to beg that someone speak harshly to her husband and seek to bring him back to the right path.

The doctor let out one of his unique guffaws and, passing me the bowl of soup, replied:

“You speak of conventional piety; I am pious in my own manner. Do we not respect a creature that we loved in life, by keeping her with us thus after death?”

I made no answer at all to the doctor’s words. I ate the soup in silence, as did his wife, while he continued to expound his ideas about the dead.

“Fear of the dead,” he said, “is not only a weakness, it is an insult, a perversion of the heart. For my part, I get along better with the dead than with the living.”

And after a moment of silence:

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“Confess, confess that you are afraid.”

I shook my head.

“It is fear, yes, just like this lady here is given over to terror, because you are both cowards. What is there in that skeleton that could possibly frighten? I do not say that it is beautiful; it is not beautiful in terms of life, but it is splendid in terms of death. Remember that we are also thus; we only have a little more flesh.”

“Only?” I asked him intently.

The doctor smiled and answered:

“Only.”

It seems that I made a gesture of annoyance, because he soon continued:

“Don’t take what I said literally. I also believe in the soul; not only believe, but demonstrate it, which not all may do. But the soul is gone; we cannot detain it; let us keep at least this, which is a part of our beloved.”

After finishing this speech, the doctor respectfully kissed the skeleton’s hand. I trembled and looked to Dona Marcelina. She had shut her eyes. I was eager to put an end to that scene, which I truly abhorred to witness. The doctor seemed to notice nothing. He talked on about the same subject, and no matter how I tried, it was impossible to divert him from it.

We were having dessert when the doctor, ending a ten-minute silence, asked:

“And, it seems to me I have not yet told you the story of this skeleton: that is, the story of my wife.”

“I do not remember,” I murmured.

“And you?” he said turning to his wife.

“Yes.”

“It was a crime,” he continued.

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“A crime?”

“Committed by me.”

“By you?”

“It is true.”

The doctor finished a piece of cheese, drank the rest of the wine in his glass, and repeated:

“It is true, a crime which I committed. My wife was well beloved by her husband; small wonder, I am all heart. One day, however, I suspected she had betrayed me; I was told that a lad from the neighborhood was her lover. Certain appearances had deceived me. One day, I declared that I knew everything, and that I was going to punish her for what she had done to me. Luisa fell at my feet, drowning in tears, protesting her innocence. I was blind; I killed her.

One can only imagine, not describe, the horror these words caused me. My hair stood on end. I looked at the man, at the skeleton, at the lady, and rubbed my brow, to see if I was really awake, or if it was merely a dream.

The doctor has his eyes fixed on the skeleton, and a tear rolled slowly down his face.

We remained in silence for about ten minutes.

The doctor broke the silence.

“Some time later, when the crime was long committed, without the knowledge of Justice, I discovered that Luisa was innocent. The pain I felt was indescribable; I had been the executioner of an angel.”

These words were said with such bitterness that I was deeply moved. It was clear that still, so many long years after the terrible incident, the doctor felt remorse for what he had done and sorrow for having lost his wife.

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Even Dona Marcelina seemed moved. But what she felt was also fear; as I later came to know, she suspected the integrity of her husband's mental faculties.

It was a mistake.

The doctor was, indeed, an unusual and eccentric man; mad he was called by those who, thinking themselves smarter than the crowd, dismissed the superstitious tales.

We said nothing for a while, and again it was he who broke the silence.

"I will not tell you how I obtained my wife's skeleton. Here it is and I shall keep it until my death. Naturally, now you would like to know my reason for bringing it to the table now I am married."

I did not answer with my lips, but my eyes told him that I truly wished to know the explanation for that mystery.

"It is quite simple," he continued; "It is so that my second wife may always be at my victim's feet, so that she shall never forget her duties, because, now as always, it is very likely that I should not seek to know the truth; I would seek justice with my own hands."

The doctor's last revelation put an end to my patience. I do not know what I said to him, but I remember he heard it with the benevolent smile he sometimes had, and answered with this single word:

"Child!"

I left right after dinner, determined never to go back.

## V

The promise was not kept.

More than once did Doctor Belem send for me at my home; I did not go. He came two or three times to urge me to dine with him.

"Or, at least, to talk," he concluded.

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I gave some excuse and didn't go.

One day, however, I received a note from his wife. It said I was the only visitor who ever went there; she asked me not to abandon her.

I went.

A fortnight had passed since that notable dinner when the doctor told me the story of the skeleton. The situation between the two was the same; apparent affability, for her part, but actually fear. The doctor appeared warm and kind, as I had always seen him with her.

On that very day, he announced that he intended to go on a journey some leagues thence.

"But I go alone," he said, "and I wish you keep my wife company, coming here sometimes."

I refused.

"Why?"

"Doctor, why should we, without urgent need, give food for forked tongues? What will they say..."

"You are right," he interrupted; "At least, do me one favor."

"What?"

"Arrange for Marcelina to spend the few weeks of my absence at your sister's home"

"That will be my pleasure."

My sister agreed to receive the wife of Dr. Belem, who was soon to leave the capital for the interior. His farewell was tender and friendly to both of us, his wife and myself; we two, as well as my sister and my brother-in-law, accompanied him for a certain distance and then went back home.

I was then able to talk to Dona Marcelina, who informed me of her concerns regarding her husband's sanity. I dissuaded her of them; I have already said what was my opinion about Doctor Belem.

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She informed me that he had already narrated his first wife's death, promising her the same fate if she should fail in her duties.

"Not even appearances will save you," the doctor added.

She also told me he was in the habit of repeatedly kissing the skeleton of his first wife and of addressing her with many words of love and tenderness. One day, dreaming about her, he rose from his bed and embraced the skeleton, begging for forgiveness.

In our house, everybody was of the opinion that Dona Marcelina should not go back to Dr. Belem's company. I was of the opposite opinion.

"He is a good man," I said, "In spite of everything; he has eccentricities, but he has a good heart."

After a month we received a letter from the doctor, in which he requested that his wife come to him, and that I do him the favor of accompanying her.

I refused to go alone with her.

My sister and my brother-in-law, however, volunteered to accompany her.

We all went.

There was, however, a requirement in the doctor's letter, an essential requirement; he ordered his wife to bring the skeleton with her.

"What new eccentricity is this?" said my brother-in-law.

"You will see," sighed Dona Marcelina melancholically, "that the only reason for this trip of mine is that he misses the skeleton."

I said nothing, but also thought it to be so.

We all left on our quest for the place where the doctor waited for us.

We were already close, when he appeared and cheerfully came to greet us. I noticed he did not show the usual tenderness to his wife; he seemed



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rather cold to her. But this continued for a brief while; an hour later he had returned to what he had always been.

We spent two days at the small town where, the doctor said, he was examining some plants, because he was also a botanist. After two days we wanted to go back to the capital; he, however, asked us to stay another twenty-four hours, and then we would all go back together.

We consented.

The following morning, he invited his wife to go and see some beautiful parasites which grew in the nearby woods. The woman trembled, but dared not refuse.

“Will you come too?” he said.

“I will,” I answered.

Dona Marcelina was heartened and gave me a thankful glance. The doctor smiled furtively. I did not immediately comprehend the reason for the grin; but I soon had the explanation.

We went to see the parasites; he went ahead with the wife, I behind them, and all three silent.

Before long, a stream appeared in front of us; but I barely saw the stream; what I saw, what made me take a step back, was a skeleton.

I screamed.

“A skeleton!” cried out Dona Marcelina.

“Relax,” said the doctor, “it is that of my first wife.”

“But...”

“I brought it here before dawn.”

Neither of us understood anything.

The doctor sat on a rock.

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“Alberto,” he said, “and you, Marcelina. Another crime ought to be committed on this occasion; but I love you so, Alberto, and loved you so, Marcelina, that I would rather break my promise...”

I wished to interrupt him, but he gave me no chance.

“You love each other,” he said.

Marcelina screamed; I began to protest.

“I know you love each other,” continued the doctor coldly; “it doesn’t matter! It is natural. Who would love an old lunatic like myself? Patience. Love one other; I was loved only once; by her.”

Saying this, he embraced the skeleton.

“Doctor, think about what you are saying...”

“I already have...”

“But the lady is innocent. Can you not see her tears?”

“I know those tears; tears are not arguments. I know you love each other; I wish you to be happy, because I was and I am your friend, Alberto. I certainly did not deserve this...”

“Oh! My friend,” I interrupted, “listen what you are saying; once you were led to commit a crime by suspicions you later knew to be unfounded. And still today you suffer remorse for what you did then. Consider, see if I could bear such slander.”

He shrugged, put his hand in his pocket, took out a piece of paper and gave it to me to read. It was an anonymous letter; I later learned it had been written by Soares.

“This is despicable” I cried.

“Perhaps,” he murmured.

And after a moment of silence:

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“In any case, my mind is made up,” the doctor said. “I want to make you happy, and there is only one way: to leave you. I will go with the one woman who always loved me. Farewell!”

The doctor embraced the skeleton and fled away from us. I ran after him; I shouted; it was all for nothing; he quickly entered the wood, and what is more his wife had fainted the ground.

I came to her aid; cried for help. After an hour, the poor lady, widowed, but not by death, was drowning in tears of affliction.

## VI

Alberto had finished the story.

“But this Doctor Belem of yours is a madman!” exclaimed one of the guests, breaking the terrified silence that had taken the audience.

“He? Mad?” said Alberto. “A madman he would certainly be indeed if by any chance he had existed. But Doctor Belem never existed, I only wanted to whet your appetite. Send for the tea.

It is pointless to describe the effect of this declaration.

## The Turkish Slipper

Look at Bacharel Duarte. He has just finished tying the stiffest, most perfect necktie of the year 1850, and Major Lopo Alves’s visit is announced to him. Note that it is evening, and past nine. Duarte trembled, and for two reasons. First, that the Major was, at all times, one of the dullest bores of the age. Second, that he was dressing specifically to go and see, at a ball, the finest blonde hair and the most thoughtful blue eyes that our climate, so scarce of them, had ever produced. The courtship was a week old. His heart, allowing itself to be trapped between two waltzes, entrusted his eyes, which were

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chestnut, with a declaration of love, which they promptly forwarded to the young lady ten minutes before supper, receiving a favorable response right after the hot chocolate. Three days later, the first letter was on its way, and by the way things were going, it would not have been surprising if, before the New Year, they were both walking down the aisle. Under these circumstances, Major Lopo Alves' arrival was a true calamity. Old friend of the family, army colleague of his deceased father, the Major was worthy of all respect. Impossible to send him away or treat him coldly. There was, fortunately, an attenuating circumstance: the Major was kin to Cecilia, the young blue-eyed lady; if it should come to that, he represented a safe vote.

Duarte put on his dressing gown and went to the living room, where Lopo Alves, with a roll of paper under his arms and eyes fixed in the air, seemed completely unaware of the bacharel's entrance.

"What good wind brings you to Catumbi at this hour?" Duarte asked, adding a pleasant tone to his voice, counseled as much by interest as by good manners.

"I don't know if the wind which brings me here is good or ill," the Major answered, smiling underneath the thick gray mustache; "I know it was a stiff wind. Are you going out?"

"I am going to Rio Comprido."

"Of course: you will be going to the widow Meneses' house. My wife and daughters should be there by now: I'll go later, if I can. I believe it is still early, is it not?" Lopo Alves pulled out his pocket watch and saw it was nine-thirty. He stroked his mustache, stood up, took a few paces around the room, sat back down and said:

"I have news for you that you certainly do not expect. The fact is, I have... I have written a drama."

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“A drama!” the bacharel exclaimed.

“What can I do? Ever since I was a child I have suffered these literary fits. Military service was not the remedy to cure me, only a palliative. The disease returned with its former strength. Now there is no remedy but to let it be, and simply aid nature.

Duarte recalled that the Major had indeed spoken on another occasion of inaugural speeches, two or three threnodies, and a good sum of articles he had written about the River Plate campaigns. A considerable amount of time had passed, however, since Lopo Alves had set aside the Platine generals and the dead; there was no sign the illness would come back, especially not in the form of a drama. The bacharel could have explained the circumstance had he known that Lopo Alves had, some weeks before, watched the performance of a play in the ultra-romantic style, a work which pleased him greatly and gave him the idea of braving the footlights. The Major did not get into these necessary minutiae, and the bacharel never learned the reason behind the soldier’s dramatic explosion. Neither learned it nor cured him of it. He praised the Major’s mental faculties, expressed his fervent desire to see the triumphant opening night of his first work, promised he would recommend it to some friends he had at the *Correio Mercantil* newspaper, and only halted and grew pale when he saw the Major, trembling with bliss, unrolling the papers he had with him.

“Thank you for your good intentions,” Lopo Alves said. “I accept the favor you promise me; before that, though, I have another to ask you. I know you to be wise and well-read; you must tell me frankly what you think about my work. I do not ask for compliments; I require honesty, and strict honesty at that. If you think it is no good, say so without mincing words.”

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Duarte wished that bitter cup would pass away from him; but it was hard to ask, and impossible to achieve. He looked sadly at his watch, which showed nine hours and fifty-five minutes, while the Major paternally ran his fingers through the one hundred and eighty pages of the manuscript.

“It will be quick,” Lopo Alves said; “I know what young men and balls are like. Rest assured that you will still dance two or three waltzes tonight, with her, if she is yours, or with others. Don’t you think we ought to go to your office? The place of sacrifice was indifferent to the bacharel; he acquiesced to his guest. The Major, taking the liberty granted by friendship, ordered the black boy not to let anybody in. The torturer wanted no witnesses. The office door was shut; Lopo Alves took his place by the desk, facing the bacharel, who sank his body and his despair into a vast morocco leather armchair, determined not to say a word to get to the end faster.

The drama was divided into seven scenes. That hint produced a shiver in the listener. There was nothing new in those hundred and eighty pages but the writer’s hand. The rest were the situations, the characters, the plot threads, and even the style of the most typical tousle-headed Romanticism. Lopo Alves regarded his work as a great invention, when he did no more than stitch together his own reminiscences. At some other moment, the work might have been a good pastime.

Right in the first scene, as a sort of prologue, there was a child taken from her family, a poisoning, two hooded men, a dagger point, and many adjectives no less sharp than the dagger. The second scene included the death of one of the hooded men, who would resuscitate in the third, only to be arrested in the fifth, and kill the tyrant in the seventh. As well as the apparent death of the hooded man, the second scene showed the abduction of the child, now a maid of seventeen, a monologue which seemed to last just as long, and the theft of a will.

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It was almost eleven when he finished reading the second scene. Duarte could barely contain his rage; it was already impossible to go to Rio Comprido. It is not out of the question to assume that, had the Major breathed his last at that moment, Duarte would have thanked Divine Providence for his death. The bacharel's sentiments made such ferocity hard to believe; but reading a bad book is capable of producing even more astounding phenomena. Also, as the bacharel's bodily eyes gazed upon Lopo Alves' mane in all its thickness, to his spirit came the golden locks which adorned Cecilia's beautiful head; he saw her with the blue eyes, the fair and rosy skin, the delicate and gracious gestures, ruling over all other ladies who ought to be in the widow Meneses' ballroom. He pictured it, and heard the song in his mind, the chatter, the sound of steps, the rustling silk; meanwhile, the hoarse, dull voice of Lopo Alves kept on enumerating scenes and dialogues, with the impassiveness of great conviction.

Time was flying by, and the listener had now lost track of the scenes. Midnight had struck long ago; the ball was gone. All of a sudden, Duarte saw the Major rolling up the manuscript again, standing, stiffening, piercing him with his evil and spiteful eyes, and leaving the office impetuously. Duarte wanted to call him back, but bewilderment hindered his voice and movements. After regaining control of himself, he heard the dramatist's stiff, choleric heels striking the stone sidewalk. He went to the window, but saw and heard nothing; author and drama had vanished.

"Why didn't he do that sooner?" the young man sighed.

The sigh barely had time to spread its wings and go out the window, towards Rio Comprido, when the black boy came to announce the visit of a short stocky man.

"At this hour?" Duarte exclaimed.

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“At this hour,” repeated the short stocky man, entering the living room. “The police can enter a citizen’s house at this or at any other hour, since the matter at hand is a serious felony.”

“A felony!”

“I believe you know me...”

“I haven’t had the honor.”

“I work with the police.”

“But what business do I have with you, sir? To what felony do you refer?”

“A trifle: a theft. You, sir, are accused of having pilfered a Turkish slipper. Apparently, the slipper is worth little or nothing at all. But there are slippers and slippers. It all depends on the circumstances.” The man spoke with a sarcastic smile, piercing the bacharel with his inquisitive eyes. Duarte was not even aware of the existence of the stolen object. He concluded there was a misunderstanding with his name, and did not become angry with the slander directed towards his person, and in some way towards his class, by attributing the pilferage to him. He said those very words to the police employee, adding that, even so, it was not a good reason to bother him at that hour of the night.

“Pardon me,” said the representative of authority. “The slipper in question is worth several dozen contos de réis; it is adorned with the finest diamonds, which make it uniquely valuable. It is Turkish not only in shape, but also in origin. Its owner, one of our most well-traveled noblewomen, was in Egypt about three years ago, where she bought it from a Jew. The story, reported by that follower of Moses about this product of Muslim industry, is truly miraculous, and, to my eyes, perfectly untruthful. But there is no reason to tell it now. All that matters is that it has been stolen, and that the police have received an accusation against you, sir.” At this point of his speech, the man came to the window; Duarte suspected he was a madman or a thief. He had no time to examine his suspicions, because within a few seconds he saw five armed men



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enter the room, lay hands on him and take him down the stairs, with no concern for the screams he produced or the desperate movements he employed. There was a coach in the street, into which they forced him. The short stocky man was already there, as well as a tall lanky one, who received him and made him sit at the back. The coachman's whip was heard, and the coach left at full speed.

“Ah! ah!” the stocky man said. “So, you thought you could steal Turkish slippers and date blond ladies with impunity, perhaps marry them... and, to top it all off, laugh at mankind.”

Upon hearing the allusion to the lady of his thoughts, Duarte shivered. This was, apparently, the effort of some supplanted rival. Or was the allusion only casual and unrelated to the adventure? Duarte became entangled in conjectures, while the coach kept on at full gallop. After a while, he ventured an observation.

“Whatever my crimes might be, I suppose the police...”

“We are not the police,” interrupted the lanky man coolly.

“Ah!”

“This gentleman and I are a duo. I, you and he are a trio. Well, a trio is not better than a pair; it is not, it cannot be. A couple is the ideal. You probably haven't understood me, have you?”

“No, sir.”

“You will, soon enough.”

Duarte resigned himself to waiting, wrapped in silence, let his body sag, and let coach and adventure race on. The horses halted just five minutes later.

“We have arrived,” the stocky man said.

That said, he pulled a kerchief out of his pocket and offered it to the bacharel, so he could blindfold himself. Duarte refused it, but the lanky man observed that it would be more prudent to obey than to resist. The bacharel did not resist; he blindfolded himself and stepped from the coach. He then heard a

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door squeak; two people, probably the same men from the coach, took his hands and led him down endless halls and stairways. As he walked, the bacharel heard some unknown voices, loose words, broken phrases. Eventually, they stopped; they told him to sit down and uncover his eyes. Duarte obeyed; but upon removing the blindfold, saw no one. It was a vast living room, well-lit, furnished with elegance and opulence. There was perhaps overmuch variety of ornaments; however, the person who had chosen them must have had refined taste.

Bronze, lacquer, carpeting, mirrors, the objects that filled the living room in their infinite copiousness were of the finest craftsmanship. Seeing it all restored serenity to the bacharel's spirit; it was unlikely that thieves lived there.

He leaned sluggishly against the ottoman... Against the ottoman! That brought back to the young man's memory the beginning of the adventure and the theft of the slipper. Some minutes of reflection were sufficient for him to realize that the slipper was now more than problematic. Digging deeper into the land of conjectures, he felt he had found a novel and definitive explanation: the slipper was purely a metaphor; it represented Cecília's heart, which he had stolen, a crime his supposed rival wanted to punish him for. The mysterious words of the lanky man would naturally be related to the metaphor: duos are better than trios; a couple is the ideal.

"That must be it," Duarte concluded; "but who could this defeated suitor be?"

At this moment, a door at the back of the living room opened, and the cassock of a bland, bald priest darkened the room. Duarte stood up, as if shot by a spring. The priest slowly crossed the living room, passed by him, blessed him, and left through another open door in the fore wall. The bacharel remained motionless, staring at the door, staring without seeing, wholly benumbed. The unexpectedness of that apparition totally confounded his previous ideas about

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the adventure. He had no time, however, to think up a new explanation, because the first door was opened again, and through it, another figure came into the room, this time the lanky man, who walked straight toward him and asked him to follow. Duarte offered no resistance. They left through a third door, and, having walked down some variously lit corridors, ended up in another room, which only received the light of two candles in silver candlesticks. The candlesticks were on a broad table. There was an elderly man at the head of the table, about fifty-five years old; he had an athletic figure, with abundant hair on his head and face.

“Do you know me?” the elderly man asked as soon as Duarte entered the room.

“No, sir.”

“It is not necessary. What we are about to do here does not require any kind of introduction. First, you will learn that the theft of the slipper was a simple pretext...”

“Oh! Of course!” Duarte interrupted.

“A simple pretext,” the elder continued, “to bring you to our house. The slipper was not stolen; it never left its owner’s hands. João Rufino, go get the slipper.”

The lanky man left, and the elder informed the bacharel that the famous slipper had no diamond, and had not been bought from any Jew in Egypt; it was, however, indeed Turkish, as he was told, and miraculously small. Duarte listened to the explanations, and, gathering all his strength, asked, resolutely:

“But, sir, will you not tell me at once what you want from me, and what I am doing in this house?”

“You will learn,” the elder answered, calmly.

The door opened, and the lanky man appeared with the slipper in his hand. Duarte, invited to come closer to the light, had the opportunity to ascertain that

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the smallness was indeed miraculous. The slipper was made of the finest morocco leather; on its inner sole, stuffed and covered with blue silk, gleamed two letters embroidered in gold.

“A child’s slipper, don’t you think?” the elder said.

“I suppose so.”

“You suppose wrongly; it is a maiden’s slipper.”

“It may as well be; I have nothing to do with this.”

“Pardon me! You have much to do, since you will marry its owner...”

“Marry!” Duarte exclaimed.

“No less. João Rufino, bring us the slipper’s owner.”

The lanky man left, and came back soon after. Approaching the door, he lifted the veil and made way for a woman, who walked to the center of the room. It was not a woman; it was a sylph, a poet’s vision, a divine creature. She was blonde; with blue eyes, like Cecília’s, rapturous eyes which sought the heavens or seemed to live from them. The hair, carelessly combed, surrounded her head like the splendor of a saint; saint only, not martyr, because the smile that poured from her lips was a smile of bliss, the likes of which can rarely have been seen on earth. A white dress, of the finest cambric, chastely wrapped her body, while outlining her form, little for the eyes, but much for the imagination. A young man, such as the bacharel, never loses his sense of elegance, even in situations like these. Duarte, seeing the lady, adjusted his robe, touched his tie, and took a bow, to which she replied with such kindness and grace that the adventure started to seem much less terrifying.

“My dear doctor, this is your bride.”

The young lady lowered her eyes; Duarte replied he did not want to get married.

“Three things you are going to do right now, sir,” the elder continued impassively.

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“First, wed her; second, write your will; third, swallow a drug from the Levant...”

“Poison!” Duarte interrupted.

“That is its vulgar name; I give it another: passport to heaven.”

Duarte was pale and cold. He wanted to speak, but could not; not a groan came out of his throat. He would have fallen to the floor, if not for a chair nearby where he allowed his body to collapse.

“You, sir,” the elder continued, “have a small fortune of one hundred and fifty contos de réis. This pearl shall be your sole heiress. João Rufino, go get the priest.”

The priest entered the room, the same bald priest who had blessed the bacharel shortly before; he entered and walked straight to the young man, solemnly sputtering a passage from Nehemiah or some other minor prophet; the priest clasped his hand and said:

“Stand up!”

“No! I do not want it! I shall not marry!”

“And now?” the elder said from the table, pointing a pistol at him.

“But is this murder?”

“Yes; the difference is in the sort of death: a violent one from this, or gentle one from the drug. Choose!”

Duarte sweated and trembled. He wanted to stand up and could not. His knees were banging against each other. The priest came closer and whispered into his ear:

“Do you want to flee?”

“Oh! Yes!” he exclaimed, not with his lips, which would have been heard, but with his eyes, in which he placed all that remained of his life.

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“Do you see that window? It is open; there is a garden beneath it. Throw yourself from it without fear.”

“Oh! Father!” the bacharel whispered.

“I am not a priest, I am an army lieutenant. Don’t say a word.”

The window was ajar; a sliver of sky, already brighter, could be seen through the crack. Duarte did not hesitate, gathered all his strength, jumped from where he was, and threw himself down to the mercy of God. The height was not great, and his fall was minor; the young man got up quickly, but the stocky man, who was in the garden, came after him.

“What is this?” he asked smiling.

Duarte did not answer; he clenched his fists, struck the man’s chest violently and darted off down the garden. The man was not knocked down; he felt only a great shock; and, once the effect was over, proceeded to hunt down the fugitive. A vertiginous chase began. Duarte jumped over walls and fences, trampling gardens and bumping into trees that every once in a while rose before him. Sweat poured down his body, his chest heaved, his strength waned little by little; one of his hands was wounded, his shirt was damp with the dew from the leaves; he was almost captured twice, his robe got caught in a thorn hedge. At last, tired, wounded, breathless, he fell on the stone steps of a house, located in the middle of the last garden he had crossed.

He looked back, but saw no one; his persecutor had not followed him there. He might come, though; Duarte made an effort to stand up, climbed the four remaining steps, and entered the house; whose open door led into a small, low room. A man in the room, reading an edition of *Jornal do Comércio*, seemed not to notice his entrance. Duarte fell on a chair. He stared at the man. It was Major Lopo Alves. The Major, holding the paper, whose dimensions were gradually becoming extremely exiguous, suddenly exclaimed:

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“Heavenly angel, you are avenged! End of last scene.”

Duarte looked at him, at the table, at the walls, rubbed his eyes, breathed deeply.

“So! What do you think?”

“Ah! Excellent!” answered the bacharel, standing up.

“Strong passions, right?”

“The strongest. What time is it?”

“It has just struck two.”

Duarte accompanied the Major to the door, breathed once more, pinched himself, and went to the window. No one knows what he thought for the first few minutes; but, after a quarter of an hour, this is what he told himself: “Nymph, sweet friend, restless and fertile fantasy, you saved me from a terrible play with an original dream, replacing boredom with a nightmare: it was a good bargain. A good bargain and a serious lesson: you have shown, once again, that the best drama is in the playgoer, not on the stage.

Título de Espavento, Longo e Meneado: traduzindo “Um Homem Célebre”  
de Machado de Assis

Ian Alexander

Ao traduzir “Um Homem Célebre”, o problema que mais me deixou inseguro e que mais demorou para se solucionar foi o dos títulos dados às músicas compostas pela personagem principal, Pestana. São seis: pela ordem que aparecem no conto, “Não Bula Comigo, Nhonhô”, “Pingos de Sol”, “A Lei de 28 de Setembro”, “Candongas Não Fazem Festa”, “Senhora Dona, Guarde o Seu Balaio” e “Bravos à Eleição Direta!”. Vou tratá-los aqui pela ordem da composição das músicas.

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O primeiro é “Pingos de Sol”, escolhido pelo compositor, ainda “donzel inédito”, para ser o “título poético” da sua primeira polca. O editor que quer publicar a polca rejeita a sugestão de Pestana, dizendo que “os títulos deviam ser, já de si, destinados à popularidade”. Não deve ser tão difícil traduzir um título rejeitado por não ser destinado à popularidade: fiquei entre “Sundrops” e “Drops of Sun”, traduções igualmente literais, e acabei escolhendo “Drops of Sun”, por ser um tantinho mais vaziamente poético.

Essa foi a parte fácil, porque depois vem os dois títulos sugeridos pelo editor como alternativas. Esses, por definição “destinados à popularidade”, tinham que soar como títulos plausíveis de músicas populares brasileiros do último quartel do século XIX, só que em inglês. Conforme o editor, existem dois tipos de título: aqueles que funcionam “por alusão a algum sucesso do dia”, a exemplo de “A Lei de 28 de Setembro”, e aqueles que chamam a atenção “pela graça das palavras”, como “Candongas Não Fazem Festa”.

A Lei de 28 de Setembro de 1871 é uma marca importante na história do Brasil, mas hoje em dia é melhor conhecida como a Lei do Ventre Livre. Se muitos brasileiros podem ler o conto de Machado no século XXI sem reconhecer o nome da lei, achei de pouca importância manipular o título da música para dar maiores informações ao leitor de inglês. Escolhi “The 28th of September Act”, que pode não ser um nome muito típico para uma lei no mundo anglófono, mas é evidentemente uma lei, ou seja, algo da vida pública do país, que me parecia suficiente para orientar a leitura. Deixei a explicação da importância da Lei do Ventre Livre para um comentário na apresentação, para aqueles leitores que querem se aprofundar um pouco mais nas ironias do Machado.

“Candongas Não Fazem Festa” foi bem mais difícil, primeiro, porque a tradução tinha que soar bem, tinha que encantar pela graça das palavras, segundo, porque as palavras têm vários sentidos, e terceiro porque o



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título não é para fazer sentido. Pestana pergunta para o editor o que quer dizer o título, e este responde que “não quer dizer nada”. O título em inglês tinha que não fazer sentido, mas tinha que fazer o mesmo tipo de não-sentido do original. O que quer dizer “candonga”, para começar? O corretor ortográfico de Microsoft não reconhece a palavra, que já me sugere que não é tão comum hoje em dia. Conforme o dicionário Aulete digital, tem quatro sentidos bem diversos:

- 1 Elogio interesseiro; bajulação; lisonja.
- 2 Mexerico, intriga
- 3 Ato de má-fé; ardil; trapaça.
- 4 Pessoa querida; benzinho; amor.

Num título explicitamente sem sentido e de apenas quatro palavras, não há contexto para decidir qual é o sentido intencionado.

“Fazer festa”, por sua vez, pode ser entendido simplesmente como celebrar ou se divertir, ou, conforme o Aulete, pode ser visto como “Afago, carícia, esp. aqueles que demonstram afeto, carinho, alegria”. Qual desses combina de alguma maneira com qualquer dos sentidos de “candonga”? “Pessoas queridas não dão carinho” parecia absurdo demais, e não existe uma palavra elegante para dizer “pessoas queridas” no título de uma música em inglês. “Trapaças não se divertem” pode até fazer sentido, mas não encontrei nenhuma maneira de tornar isso gracioso na tradução. Acabei escolhendo o segundo sentido – mexerico, intriga, fofoca – que eu traduzi como “Gossips Don’t Dance”. Eu não sei se eu compraria uma música com esse título, mas não me parecia implausível. Há uma certa tradição de músicas em inglês com a palavra “dance” no título, existe uma música de Lou Reed, da década de 70, chamada “Sally Can’t Dance”, e eu gostei da aliteração de “don’t” e “dance”.

O contraste entre os dois possíveis títulos da mesma música – uma da vida pública, outra frívola – já deve ser evidente; com a informação

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adicional sobre a Lei do Ventre Livre, a verdadeira dimensão da ironia deve ficar evidente.

Pestana não aceitou nenhuma das sugestões e se recusou a publicar a polca, mas logo em seguida acabou publicando tanto essa quanto outra, “com os títulos que ao editor parecessem mais atraentes ou apropriados”. Daí em diante, ele seguiu essa regra, de cuidar da composição e deixar o editor cuidar dos títulos. Uma das músicas assim publicadas é “Não Bula Comigo, Nhonhô”, a polca que Pestana toca na festa no início do conto. “Nhonhô” sugere a relação entre escravo e dono, que eu resolvi representar por “Massa”, corrupção de “master” com paralelo para a corrupção de “senhor”. Conforme o Aulete, “bulir com” tem vários sentidos, inclusive “tirar a virgindade de”, que é uma opção interessante, mas difícil de colocar no título de uma música em inglês, porque não existe uma expressão ao mesmo tempo informal e não excessivamente polissilábica. Rejeitei a possibilidade de “provocar sentimento, emoção etc. em”, por não combinar muito bem com a relação de escravo e dono, e acabei escolhendo “fazer caçoada, zombaria de (alguém)”, que eu traduzi como “toy with”, que comporta a possibilidade de um sentido sexual, sem forçar demais. Fiquei, então, com “Don’t Toy with Me, Massa”, que é para ter um toque leve mas deixar transparecer as possibilidades de crueldade e de objetualização inerentes na escravatura, já que “toy” também pode ser o substantivo “brinquedo”.

O próximo título, também escolhido pelo editor, pertence à polca composta por Pestana no dia depois da festa na primeira parte do conto: “Senhora Dona, Guarde o Seu Balaio”. Descrito como um “título de espanto, longo e meneado”, é evidentemente um dos títulos que devem encantar pela graça das palavras. Aqui, tive que cuidar para usar um número suficiente de sílabas para combinar com a descrição. Para “senhora dona”, escolhi usar “my dear lady”: quatro sílabas em vez de cinco no original, mas achei difícil espichar

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ainda mais. “Balaio” trouxe dificuldades, porque no nível mais óbvio, é simplesmente uma cesta grande, mas também tem o sentido secundário, conforme o Aulete, de “as nádegas, os quadris, especialmente quando volumosos”. Não encontrei nenhum substantivo em inglês capaz de ser algo parecido com uma cesta e ao mesmo tempo sugerir algo erótico. Assim, tive que escolher entre forçar ou perder a conotação sexual, e no final achei menos errado perder o sentido secundário que pode não ser reconhecido por muitos leitores do original. A minha aproximação, então, foi “My Dear Lady, Keep your Basket to Yourself”. Em vez de “guardar”, usei um verbo que sugere um tipo de invasão do espaço pessoal, para tentar recuperar um pouco do duplo sentido perdido com o trocadilho.

O último título vem mais no final do conto, alguns anos depois dos sucessos das outras polcas: “Bravos à Eleição Direta!” Por ser daqueles que se referem aos eventos do dia, e não daqueles charmosos e insinuantes, a tarefa não parece tão difícil. Conforme o editor, “os liberais foram chamados ao poder, vão fazer a reforma eleitoral”, mas o título não faz nenhum comentário político: é simplesmente uma maneira de levar a música no embalo do momento. Por isso, achei uma tradução direta mais adequada, e escolhi “Three Cheers for Direct Election!”

#### Bibliografia

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## A Famous Man

“Ah, are you Pestana?” asked Miss Mota, with a gesture of admiration. And then, correcting her familiar address: “Forgive my manners, but ... are you really he?”

Annoyed, irritated, Pestana replied that yes, it was he. He was coming from the piano, drying his brow with a handkerchief, when the young lady stopped him. It was not a ball, merely a private gathering, twenty people in all, who had gone to dine with the widow Camargo, in Areal Street, on that, her birthday, fifth of November, 1875. Fine, entertaining widow! She loved laughter and amusement, despite the sixty years that she was entering upon, and it was the last time she amused herself and laughed, as she passed away in the first week of 1876. Fine, entertaining widow! With what spirit and diligence she had arranged a few dances, soon after dinner, asking Pestana if he would play a quadrille! It was not even necessary to complete the request; Pestana bowed politely and raced to the piano. The quadrille finished, they had rested barely ten minutes and the widow again ran to Pestana with a very personal favour.

“Speak, my lady.”

“If you would play that polka of yours, Don’t Toy with Me, Massa.”

Pestana made a face, but quickly hid his feelings, bowed in silence, without politeness, and went to the piano, without enthusiasm. As the first bars were heard, a new happiness spilt out over the salon, the gentlemen rushed to the ladies and the pairs began to hop to the latest polka. The latest, having been published just three weeks earlier; already there was not a corner of the city where it was unknown. It was well on the way to that state of grace of being whistled or sung to oneself at night.

Miss Mota found it hard to believe that the Pestana she had seen at the dining table and then at the piano, stuck in a snuff-coloured frock coat,

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hair long, black and curly, careful eyes, shaved chin, was Pestana the composer; it was a friend who mentioned it when she saw him leave the piano, once the polka was finished. Hence the admiring question. We have seen that his reply was irritated and annoyed. Even so, the two young ladies did not spare him their fine compliments, such and so many that the most modest vanity would be content to hear them; he received them with growing tedium until, claiming a headache, he asked to be excused. Neither they nor the hostess, nor anyone else, was able to detain him. They offered him home remedies, some rest, but he accepted nothing, insisted on leaving, and left.

In the street, he walked swiftly, afraid that they would yet call him; he only relaxed after he turned the corner into Formosa Street. But even there, his great festive polka awaited him. From a modest house on the right, a few metres away, came the notes of the composition of the day, blown on a clarinet. There was dancing. Pestana stopped for a few moments, almost regretted his route, but walked on, sped up, crossed the street and continued on the far side from the house with the ball.

Gradually, the notes became lost in the distance, and our man entered Aterrado Street, where he lived. Close to his house, he saw two men coming towards him: one of them, passing very close to Pestana, began to whistle that same polka, strongly, *con brio*; the other picked up the rhythm, and there they went down the street, loud and happy, while the author of the piece, desperate, ran to get into his house.

At home, he breathed. Old house, old stairs, an old black man who served him, and who came to see whether he wanted supper.

“I don’t want anything,” Pestana snapped; “make me coffee and go to bed.”

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He undressed, put on his nightshirt and went to his large back room. When the black man lit the gas in the room, Pestana smiled and, in his soul, greeted the ten portraits that hung on the wall.

Only one was in oils, that of a priest, who had schooled him and taught him Latin and music and who, according to the idle minds, was actually Pestana's father. It was true that he had left the inheritance of that old house and that old furniture from the time of Pedro I. He had composed a few hymns, had the priest, and was mad about music, sacred or profane, and his taste had influenced the boy, or perhaps had been transmitted in the blood, if it was true what the gossips said, but that is not the issue of my story, as you will see.

The other portraits were of classical composers: Cimarosa, Mozart, Beethoven, Gluck, Bach, Schumann, and some three others; some engravings, others lithographs, all poorly framed and of different sizes, but placed there like saints in a church. The piano was the altar; the night's gospel was open there: it was a Beethoven sonata.

The coffee arrived; Pestana gulped the first cup and sat at the piano. He looked at the portrait of Beethoven and began to play a sonata, unaware of himself, unbalanced or absorbed, but with great perfection. He repeated the piece, stopped for a few moments, got up and went to one of the windows. He returned to the piano: it was Mozart's turn, and he chose a passage and played it in the same manner, with his soul transported. Haydn took him to midnight and the second cup of coffee.

Between midnight and one, Pestana did little more than stand at the window and look at the stars, then come back and look at the portraits. Every so often, he went to the piano and, on foot, struck the keyboard in a random manner, as if he were searching for some thought that didn't come, then he would return to the window. The stars seemed so many musical notes fixed upon the heavens and waiting for someone to detach them: the time would come when

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the heavens would have to be empty, but then the earth would be a constellation of scores. No image, dementia or reflection brought any memory of Miss Mota, who was, nonetheless, at that very hour, going to sleep, thinking of him, the famous author of so many beloved polkas. Perhaps the idea of marriage cost the young lady a few moments of sleep. So? She was around twenty, he around thirty, a good match. The young lady slept to the sound of the polka, known by heart, while its author thought neither of the polka nor the girl, but of old classics, questioning the heavens and the night, imploring the angels, as a last resort, the devil. Why could he not produce just one of those immortal pages?

Sometimes, it seemed that the aurora of an idea would arise from the depths of his unconscious: he would run to the piano to express it whole, translate it into sounds, but in vain: the idea vanished. Other times, seated at the piano, he let his fingers flow as they would, to see if fantasias would spring from them, as from Mozart's: but nothing, nothing, the inspiration didn't come, the imagination allowed itself to remain asleep. If, by chance, an idea appeared, sharp and beautiful, it was only an echo of someone else's piece which his memory repeated, and which he supposed he invented. Then, irritated, he got up, swore he would abandon his art, go and grow coffee or pull a handcart, but after ten minutes, there he was again, his eyes on Mozart, imitating him at the piano.

Two, three, four o'clock. After four, he went to bed; he was tired, discouraged, dead; he had lessons to teach the next day. He slept little, woke at seven. He dressed and ate. "Does sir want his cane or his umbrella?" asked the negro, following the orders he had been given, because sir was frequently distracted.

"The cane."

"But it looks like rain today."

"Rain," Pestana repeated, mechanically.

"It appears so, sir, the sky is quite dark."

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Pestana looked at the negro, vaguely, concerned. Suddenly:

“Wait there.”

He raced to the portrait room, opened the piano, sat and spread his hands on the keyboard. He started to play something of his own, a true, instant inspiration, a polka, a lively polka, as the advertisements say. No refusal on the composer’s part: his fingers went plucking the notes, linking them, moving them; you could say that the muse composed and danced at the same time. Pestana forgot his students, forgot the negro, who was waiting for him with the cane and the umbrella, even forgot the portraits hanging seriously on the wall. He just composed, playing or writing, without the vain efforts of the previous night, without exasperation, begging nothing of the heavens, asking nothing of Mozart’s eyes. No boredom. Life, charm, novelty flowed from his soul like a perennial spring.

In very little time, the polka was done. He corrected a few points, when he returned for dinner, but he was already singing it to himself as he walked in the street. He liked it: in this latest composition there ran the blood of paternity and of vocation. Two days later, he took it to the publisher of his other polkas, which numbered around thirty. The publisher thought it lovely.

“It will be a great success.”

Then there was the business of the title. When he had composed his first polka, in 1871, Pestana had wanted to give it a poetic title, and chose Drops of Sun. The publisher shook his head and said that the titles should be, of themselves, destined for popularity, either through allusion to some event of the day, or through the charm of the words. He suggested two: The 28th of September Act, or Gossips Don’t Dance.

“But what does Gossips Don’t Dance mean?” asked the author.

“It doesn’t mean anything, but it will catch on quickly.”



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Pestana, still an unpublished innocent, rejected both names and took back the polka, but soon composed another, and the desire for publicity led him to print the two of them, with whatever titles the publisher found most attractive or appropriate. From then on, that became his rule.

Now, when Pestana handed over his new polka and they moved on to the title, the publisher remembered that, for quite some time, he had had one in mind for the next work that he should offer: an ostentatious title, long and sinuous. It was this: *My Dear Lady, Keep your Basket to Yourself*.

“And for next time,” he added, “I have another one ready.”

As soon as it was on the shelves, the first edition sold out. The composer’s fame was enough to bring in the customers, but the work itself also matched the style, original, danceable, easy to remember. In a week, it was famous. Pestana, in those first days, was truly in love with his composition: he liked to sing it under his breath, he stopped in the street to listen to it being played in some house and was irritated when it was not played well. From the start, the theatre orchestras took it up, and he went to hear one of them. He also didn’t mind hearing it whistled, one night, by a figure walking down Aterrado Street.

The honeymoon only lasted a week. Just like the other times, and even more rapidly, the old masters in the portraits made him bleed with remorse. Annoyed and bored, Pestana lashed out against the one who had consoled him so many times, the easy, charming muse with sly eyes and rounded gestures. And then his self-disgust returned, the hatred towards anyone who asked for a new, fashionable polka, together with the effort to compose something with a classical flavor, even one page, just one, but such that it could be bound between Bach and Schumann. Worthless study, pointless effort. He dived into that Jordan without coming up baptised. Night after night he spent his energy like that,

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trusting and stubborn, sure that willpower was all, and that, once he let go of the simple music...

“Those polkas can go to hell and make the devil dance,” he said one day, in the early hours, as he went to bed.

But the polkas didn't want to go that deep. They came to Pestana's house, to his very own portrait room, bursting in so fully formed that he had no more time but to compose them, publish them, like them for a few days, get sick of them, and return to the old sources, from which nothing sprang. He lived this alternation until he married, and after he married.

“Marry whom?” asked Miss Mota of her uncle the clerk, who had brought her the news.

“He's going to marry a widow.”

“Old?”

“Twenty-seven.”

“Pretty?”

“No, and not ugly. So-so. I heard that he fell in love with her because he heard her sing at the last feast of Saint Francis of Paula. But I also heard that she has another attribute, less rare and less valuable: she is consumptive.”

Clerks shouldn't be witty – in a bad way, I mean. This one's niece felt a droplet of balsam in these last words, which cured her of a little pinch of envy. It was all true. Pestana got married some days later to a widow of twenty-seven, a good singer, and consumptive. He welcomed her as the spiritual wife of his genius. Celibacy was, without doubt, the cause of his sterility and lack of focus, he told himself; artistically, he felt he wandered the streets in the dead of night; his polkas were a dandyish diversion. Now, he would father a family of works, serious, profound, inspired, wellcrafted.

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This hope had budded in the first hours of love and bloomed at the first dawn of marriage.

Maria, his soul sobbed, give me what I could not find in my solitary nights, nor my busy days.

He soon had the idea, to commemorate the union, of composing a nocturne. He would call it Ave, Maria. His happiness seemed to bring him the seed of inspiration; wishing to say nothing to his wife until it was finished, he worked in private; this was difficult, because Maria, with equal love for the art, came to play with him, or simply to hear him, for hours on end, there in the portrait room. They even gave some weekly concerts, with three artist friends of Pestana's. One Sunday, however, the husband could stand it no more and called his wife to play a passage of the nocturne; he said nothing of what or whose it was. Suddenly, stopping, he questioned her with his eyes.

“Finish it,” said Maria, “isn't it Chopin?”

Pestana paled, stared into space, repeated one or two passages and stood up. Maria sat at the piano and, after some effort of memory, played the Chopin piece. The idea, the motif were the same: Pestana had found them in one of those dark alleys of memory, old city of betrayals.

Saddened, desperate, he left the house and walked towards the bridge, on the way to St. Christopher's.

“Why fight it?” he said. “I'll go with the polkas... Long live the polka!”

Men who passed by and heard him stopped and stared, as at a madman. And he walked on, lost in thought, mortified, eternal shuttlecock between ambition and vocation... He passed the old abattoir; when he reached the gate of the railway, he had the idea of walking up the track and waiting for the first train to come and crush him. The guard sent him back. He came to his senses and went home.

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A few days later, a clear, fresh morning in May 1876, at six o'clock, Pestana felt a peculiar and familiar trembling in his fingers. He got up slowly, so as not to wake Maria, who had coughed all night and was now deeply asleep. He went to the portrait room, opened the piano and, as quietly as possible, pulled from it a polka. He published it under a pseudonym; in the following two months, he composed and published two more. Maria knew nothing of it; she continued coughing and dying until she passed away, one night, in her frightened, desperate husband's arms.

It was Christmas Eve. Pestana's pain was increased, because there was a ball in the neighborhood where they played a number of his best polkas. The ball itself was hard enough; his compositions gave it an air of irony and perversity. He felt the cadence of the steps, guessed at the movements, perhaps sensuous, which some of those compositions required; all of this at the foot of a pale corpse, a package of bones, stretched out on the bed... Each hour of the night passed in that way, slow or fast, damp with tears and sweat, with cologne and disinfectant, jumping ceaselessly, as if to the sound of a polka by a great, invisible Pestana.

His wife buried, the widower had just one concern: to abandon music, after composing a requiem, which he would have performed on the first anniversary of Maria's death. He would choose another job, minor clerk, postman, peddler, anything to make him forget that murderous, deaf art.

He started the work; gave everything to it, solemnity, patience, meditation, even the fancies of chance, as he had done before, imitating Mozart, whose Requiem he re-read and studied. Weeks and months passed. The work, swift at first, dropped its pace. Pestana had his highs and lows.

Sometimes he felt it incomplete; he found in it no sacred soul, no idea, no inspiration, no method; sometimes his heart was lifted up and he worked vigorously. Eight months, nine, ten, eleven, and the requiem was not

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finished. He redoubled his effort, ignored lessons and friendships. He had remade the work many times, but now he wanted to finish it, however he could. Fifteen days, eight, five... The dawn of the anniversary found him still working.

He made do with a simple mass, just for himself. It would be impossible to say whether all the tears that came unexpectedly to his eyes were those of a husband, or if some were those of a composer. In any case, he never returned to the requiem.

“For what?” he asked himself.

Another year ended. At the start of 1878, his publisher appeared.

“There’s two years gone,” he said, “with not a sign from you. Everyone asks if you have lost your gift. What have you been doing?”

“Nothing.”

“I understand the blow that brought you down, but it has been two years. I came to offer you a contract: twenty polkas in twelve months, the old price, and a higher percentage on sales. Then, after a year, we can renew it.”

Pestana agreed with a gesture. He had few lessons, had sold the house to pay debts, and expenses were eating away the rest, which was small enough. He accepted the contract.

“But the first polka has to be now,” explained the publisher. “It’s urgent. Did you see the letter from the Emperor to the Duke of Caxias? The Liberals have been called to form a government, they are going to introduce electoral reforms. The polka will be called Three Cheers for Direct Election! It’s not politics; it’s just a good topical title.”

Pestana composed his first work under the contract. Despite his long silence, he had lost neither his originality nor his inspiration. It had the same touch of genius. The other polkas kept coming, on time. He kept the portraits and the repertoires, but avoided spending every night at the piano, so as not to fall back into new attempts. Now he asked for free tickets whenever there

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was a good opera or concert by some artist; he would go and hide himself in a corner, enjoying those things that would never spring from his brain. Once or twice, while heading home full of music, the unpublished maestro woke in him; then he would sit at the piano and, without ideas, he played a few notes until he went off to bed, twenty or thirty minutes later.

Thus passed the years until 1885. Pestana's fame had given him an uncontested first place among the composers of polkas, but first place in the village did not satisfy this Caesar, who continued to prefer not even the second, but the hundredth place in Rome. He still had the doubts of earlier times about his compositions, with the difference that they were less violent. Neither the enthusiasm of the first hours, nor the horror after the first week; some small pleasure, a certain tedium.

That year, he caught a slight fever, which grew in a few days to become quite serious. He was already in danger when his publisher appeared, knowing nothing of the illness, to give him the news that the Conservatives were back in power, and to request a polka for the occasion. The nurse, a poor clarinettist from the theatre, referred to Pestana's health in such a way that the publisher knew to say no more. It was the sick man who insisted that he say what he wished, and the publisher obeyed.

"But it will have to be when you are quite well," he finished.

"As soon as the fever dies down a bit," said Pestana.

There was a pause of a few seconds. The clarinettist slipped out to prepare the medicine; the publisher got up to say goodbye.

"Adieu."

"Look," said Pestana, "as I will probably die before long, I'll give you two polkas soon; the other will do for when the Liberals come to power again."

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It was the only witty thing he had said in his whole life, and just in time, as he passed on the next morning, at five past four, at peace with the world, but not with himself.