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Fantastic Sexism? Subverting the *Femme Fatale* and *Femme Fragile* in the  
Fantastic Fiction of Machado de Assis

Jordan Benjamin Jones

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

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## ABSTRACT

### Fantastic Sexism? Subverting the *Femme Fatale* and *Femme Fragile* in the Fantastic Fiction of Machado de Assis

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Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis, arguably the most famous Brazilian author, has been studied perhaps more than any other figure in Brazilian literature. Because Machado's novels are so exceptional, many of his good short stories have been neglected by scholars, particularly those categorized by some as "fantastic." This study attempts to fill that gap by analyzing the most prominent female characters in Machado's fantastic fiction. After providing a brief overview of the term *fantastic* and explaining how the stories used qualify as fantastic, this study identifies several tropes into which their female characters fit. Chapter 1: The *Femme Fragile* analyzes the tropes of *woman as foil for rational man* and *woman as manipulable possession*, while Chapter 2: The *Femme Fatale* examines the tropes of *woman as siren* and *woman as fantastic other*. Although these tropes seem to expose Machado's misogyny, in reality they function as his dramatization of the erroneous chauvinist thinking of nineteenth-century Brazil. Machado employs these tropes only to subvert them and the patriarchal thinking on which they are based, allowing his readers to come to more productive ways of seeing gender relations in Brazil.

Keywords: Machado de Assis, fantastic, women, tropes

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## INTRODUCTION

### Women in Machado's Fantastic

Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis, arguably the most famous Brazilian author, has been studied perhaps more than any other figure in Brazilian literature. Despite the great number of Machadian studies, however, not enough emphasis has been placed on his female characters. In his recent book *Machado de Assis and Female Characterization: The Novels*, Earl Fitz writes that Machado's female characters "constitute a dynamic, complex, and too long underrated, perhaps even misconstrued, dimension of his narrative art" (3). Helen Caldwell drew attention to this problem with her book *The Brazilian Othello of Machado de Assis: A Study of Dom Casmurro*, in which she challenges the pervasive perception of Capitu as guilty of adultery. Since then, numerous studies focusing on women in Machado de Assis's novels have been published, most of which focus on his novels. As suggested by its title, Fitz's book analyzes the women in Machado's novels and argues they are "critical" to his ideas as an author, political thinker, and philosopher (1). This surge in scholarship about female characters in Machado's fiction is a positive development, which helps us situate Machado in relation to romantic and realist literature. In discussing the relatively small number of studies on Machado's women, Fitz states that "we have, in a sense, been blinded by the brilliance of his male characters," leading us to overlook his female characters (7). He explains further that we need to examine "the implications, aesthetic as well as political, of these still incomplete readings of Machado's novelistic women" (4). The rest of his book constitutes his insights into the female characters in Machado's novels, with a short section addressing some of the Brazilian author's best-known short stories, such as "Uns braços" and "Missa do galo."

While Fitz's (and others') contributions to our understanding of Machado's novelistic women are considerable, I argue that, just as we have been "blinded by the brilliance of

[Machado's] male characters," we have also been blinded by the brilliance of his novels. Or, as Paul Dixon asserts, "Os contos de Machado de Assis têm sido muito elogiados, mas pouco estudados" (10). Because Machado's novels are so exceptional, many of his good short stories have been neglected, particularly those categorized by some as "fantastic." This study attempts to fill that gap by analyzing the most prominent female characters in Machado's fantastic fiction.<sup>1</sup> After providing a brief overview of the term *fantastic* and explaining how the stories used qualify as fantastic, this study identifies several tropes into which their female characters fit. Chapter 1 studies the tropes of *woman as foil for rational man* and *woman as manipulable possession*, while Chapter 2 examines the tropes of *woman as siren* and *woman as fantastic other*. Although these tropes seem to expose what could be perceived as misogynistic tendencies, in reality Machado uses them to problematize the erroneous chauvinist thinking of nineteenth-century Brazil. He employs these tropes only to subvert the patriarchal thinking on which they are based, encouraging his readers to come to more productive ways of seeing gender relations in Brazil.

### The Fantastic in North America and Europe

Perhaps the most well-known definition of the fantastic comes from the Bulgarian-French critic Tzvetan Todorov, who defines it as "that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event" (25). He explains that the

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<sup>1</sup> While many studies of the fantastic in Machado de Assis have appeared in recent years, none focus specifically on the female characters in this genre. There are studies that look at women in some of his fantastic stories, such as Isabel Cristina Hentz's study "Filhos legítimos da ciência: Os homens de ciência nos contos de Machado de Assis (1870-1884)" and Adriana da Costa Teles's work "Viver e morrer de amor em 'O anjo das donzelas.'" In my research, however, I found no study seeking to analyze women in the entire group of Machado's fantastic stories.

fantastic borders two other genres: the marvelous and the uncanny.<sup>2</sup> If the apparently supernatural event can be rationally explained, it fits into the category of the uncanny; if it cannot, it belongs to the marvelous. Todorov also states that there are three criteria inherent in the fantastic: (1) the reader must hesitate between “a natural and a supernatural explanation” of the phenomenon, (2) a character in the story may also experience this hesitation, and (3) the reader must decide that the story is not allegorical; rather, it is to be taken literally (33). Todorov states that, while the second of these criteria is optional, the first and third must be satisfied before we can call something “fantastic.” For Todorov, the fantastic can only exist as long as the hesitation persists. At the end of the story the reader decides to accept either the natural or supernatural explanation for the event, thus placing it in the category of the uncanny (in the case of the natural explanation) or the marvelous (in the case of the supernatural explanation) (41). This definition, first published in 1970, has drawn much attention to the fantastic and has generated myriad responses, some supporting and others criticizing his definitions. And while the scope of this study does not permit a recapitulation of all critics’ ideas, reviewing some are essential to understanding the fantastic of Machado de Assis.

Rosemary Jackson lauds Todorov for bringing critical merit to the study of the fantastic but proposes an alternate approach: viewing the fantastic as a mode. She posits that the fantastic “takes the real and breaks it” (20), and according to that definition she argues that many texts have fantastic elements, despite their not being exclusively fantastic. Adopting Jackson’s view allows us to incorporate many more texts and authors into our study of the fantastic than

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<sup>2</sup> The terms Todorov uses are *le merveilleux* and *l'étrange*. Although *l'étrange* is generally translated as *uncanny*, it should not be confused with Freud’s notion of *das Unheimliche*, which is also translated as *uncanny*.



Todorov's restrictive definition permits.<sup>3</sup> Such an expansive approach is important to her theory, because Jackson sees the fantastic as a tool for social criticism, including in her analysis many authors not typically associated with the fantastic. She states that these "mainstream novelists, working primarily with realistic conventions, also relied upon non-realistic modes" (123). Such works show that "a dialogue between fantastic and realistic narrative modes often operates within individual texts, as the second attempts to repress and defuse the subversive thrust of the first" (124). In fact, she quotes Todorov as saying that fantastic literature is "nothing more than the uneasy conscience of the positivist nineteenth century" pushing back against mainstream ideals (25-26).<sup>4</sup>

Cynthia Duncan makes a similar (albeit less political) attempt to broaden Todorov's definition by considering different cultures and literary traditions in studying the fantastic. In her book *Unraveling the Real*, she explains that there is "no single definition of the fantastic" that satisfies everyone, but she adds that most critics agree that it introduces elements that readers find "supernatural or otherworldly, inexplicable or impossible," and that cause them to "hesitate or doubt the nature of what they are reading" (2). She proposes that we approach the fantastic by recognizing that "it can shift, slide, and transform itself over time and across cultures, and that as a literary genre it remains resistant to closure" (3). The reason for this is that our perception of reality changes over time and from one culture to another, thereby modifying what we consider

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<sup>3</sup> Eric Rabkin presents a similar idea when he suggests that we "consider narratives as arrayed along a continuum, ordered in terms of increasing use of the fantastic, with true Fantasies as the polar extreme" (28). Thus, while some texts are not entirely fantastic, they do have fantastic elements that can shed light on how the fantastic functions in literature.

<sup>4</sup> The title of her book, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, demonstrates how central she sees social criticism to the function of the fantastic.

to be fantastic (33). Taiwanese critic Fanfan Chen states the following about this principle of a culturally dependent fantastic:

An English reader undoubtedly accepts the existence of ghosts while reading fantastic stories implying a haunted house. On the contrary, a French reader is more skeptical about the existence of ghosts and the phenomenon of being haunted. This difference is even greater if we compare a Chinese reader with a French reader. A Chinese reader would conclude *without hesitation* that the disquieting invisible phenomenon in Maupassant's "Le Horla" is nothing but a ghost. This is why the story is often included in the collection translated in Chinese language as "Selected ghost stories." (24-25)

Such differences in cultural perspectives and beliefs generate different views of what is real, and therefore different (even contradictory) views of what is fantastic. According to Colin Manlove, such cultural differences shape Todorov's definition of the fantastic: "Todorov was concerned with certain French works of the nineteenth century which produced a hesitation in the reader between 'supernatural' and 'natural' readings" (53-54). By focusing on French texts, Todorov arrived at his definition of the fantastic, but that definition proves restrictive when considering texts from other cultures or time periods. Duncan echoes this sentiment by pointing out that much of fantastic theory so far has focused on North American and European conceptions of the term, with little focus on Latin America. She analyzes Spanish-American authors such as Jorge Luis Borges and Julio Cortázar in attempting to broaden our perspective of the fantastic, but she limits the scope of her study to Spanish-American literature, thus excluding Brazilian authors

entirely.<sup>5</sup> This study is an effort to bring the Brazilian—and more specifically the Machadian—fantastic to the attention of critics to see how it can change and enhance their understanding of the term, at least in an international context. Having briefly examined some of the main theorists of the fantastic, we turn to Brazilian scholars to see how their ideas complement those of their North American and European counterparts.<sup>6</sup>

### The Brazilian Fantastic

In response to the question “Is there a ‘Brazilian fantastic?’” Braulio Tavares answers that it depends. He explains that one of the most popular fantastic narratives found in Brazil is that of the “brasileiro mítico,” in which the hero is a poor, humble man who completes a quest and encounters fantastic animals along the way (8). After mentioning a few such works by Mário de Andrade, Ariano Suassuna, and others, he comments that these works are not designed to create hesitation in the reader’s mind and therefore do not satisfy the Todorovian definition of the fantastic (9). Indeed, many scholars agree with Audemaro Goulart’s assertion that “os contos de Murilo Rubião inauguram, na literatura brasileira, o gênero do fantástico enquanto forma intencional e sistemática de elaboração da obra literária” (9). And while Rubião was one of the first Brazilian authors to dedicate himself entirely to the genre of the fantastic (publishing his

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<sup>5</sup> Duncan’s observation about Latin America’s position in fantastic studies is still largely true for North American and European scholars. Since her book was published in 2010, there have been an increasing number of Brazilian scholars addressing the fantastic in Brazil, but these scholars publish mostly in Portuguese, making it difficult for non-Portuguese-speaking scholars to discover their ideas.

<sup>6</sup> My brief discussion of fantastic criticism in this study echoes the sentiment of George W. Young in his book *Subversive Symmetry: Exploring the Fantastic in Mark 6:45-56*: “In addition to these scholars [Todorov, Bessière, Jackson, Freud, Rabkin, Tolkien, and others], there are, of course, many other critics whose works have contributed in meaningful ways to fantastic studies, or which touch upon issues related to the fantastic, but it would be tedious to enumerate them all here” (66). I have mentioned critics whose work seems most relevant to understanding the fantastic in Machado de Assis, and by no means do I claim to have provided an exhaustive review of existing literature on the fantastic.

first collection of short stories in 1947), he was certainly not the first Brazilian writer to employ fantastic elements in his stories.

Jerônimo Monteiro provides valuable insight into this concept when he writes that most fantastic works read by Brazilians are translations of principally English works. According to him, it is not that the fantastic does not exist in Brazil, but rather, “há muitas lendas, superstições e assombrações por esse sertão, e há pouco quem se aproveite do tema para escrever” (1). While few or no authors dedicated themselves chiefly to the fantastic prior to Rubião, the fantastic was certainly a part of Brazilian culture and literature before that. José Paulo Paes, in his preface to *Maravilhas do conto fantástico*, seeks to discount early authors’ use of the fantastic: “Embora grandes escritores tenham cultivado o conto fantástico, fizeram-no quase sempre em caráter accidental, circunstância que limita, necessariamente, a importância da sua contribuição” (12). But if, as Paes argues earlier in his preface, the fantastic and the real should be so interwoven as to make them inseparable, then why not look at realist writers who turn to the fantastic (whether consciously or not) in their writing? Does that not illustrate how the fantastic permeates everything we do, whether or not we recognize it?

Tavares’s simple definition allows for a more expansive view of the Brazilian fantastic than that proposed by Paes: “O fantástico é tudo que não é . . . tudo que não pode acontecer” (7-8). In this sense, it does not matter whether the author intentionally cultivates the fantastic in his or her work; what matters is how the text’s events exceed the limits of reality. As Maria Cristina Batalha writes, the fantastic “implica então uma incompatibilidade dentro do próprio enunciado, instalando um curto-circuito nas relações de causalidade que o texto tenta construir” (13).<sup>7</sup> The

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<sup>7</sup> This idea recalls Rabkin’s idea that each narrative establishes “ground rules,” and that “the truly fantastic occurs when the ground rules of a narrative [and not necessarily the ground rules of the reader’s world] are forced to

phrase “que o texto tenta construir” is important because it reminds us that reality can differ from one text to another, and that it is unrealistic (perhaps even fantastic) to offer more than a vague statement about what the term “fantastic” means. The Brazilian fantastic, like the Todorovian fantastic, is rooted in that which is beyond mortal comprehension. But unlike the Todorovian fantastic, the Brazilian fantastic does not always demand a rational answer, being content at times to simply accept the unknowability of some things.<sup>8</sup>

### The Machadian Fantastic

Before beginning an analysis of the fantastic in Machado de Assis, I should make it clear that Machado is by no means exclusively (or even primarily) devoted to the fantastic. Of the approximately two hundred short stories he wrote, only about twenty are commonly considered fantastic in some way. The bulk of his early work is considered romantic; his later work is mostly realist and contains strong critiques of the wistful ideals of romanticism.<sup>9</sup> But despite the relatively small portion of his work associated with the fantastic, understanding how Machado engaged with these ideas will enhance our understanding of the nineteenth-century beginnings of the fantastic in Brazil and its evolution after his lifetime.

In his essay “A nova geração,” Machado de Assis writes that “a realidade é boa, o realismo é que não presta para nada.” Machado’s frequent recourse to non-realist elements in his stories suggests, as this statement implies, that he feels constrained by realist techniques and views them as incapable of representing all he wants to convey in his writing. (The deceased

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make a 180° reversal, when prevailing perspectives are directly contradicted. This is true, even if the effect lasts only a moment . . . and is true whether the reversal occurs in a Fantasy or not” (12). We assume the ground rules of the narrative are the same as those of the world we inhabit, unless the text specifies otherwise.

<sup>8</sup> Such is the case of Coelho Neto’s short story “A casa ‘sem sono,’” in which Dimas responds to the fantastic by stating simply, “Essas coisas não se explicam” (74).

<sup>9</sup> In addition to criticizing romanticism, Machado’s realist works condemn the pseudo-scientific thinking of naturalism, the literary movement many of his contemporaries embraced after realism.

narrator of *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas* is just one example of how Machado sometimes disregards realist techniques.) Cristina Ferreira Pinto's comment in *Gender, Discourse, and Desire in Twentieth-Century Brazilian Women's Literature* supports this interpretation: "What matters in Machado de Assis's *Dom Casmurro*—and what matters in all his novels—are not so much the facts, but rather, how they are narrated" (30). This same principle applies to his short stories, in which fantastic elements often appear: many of the narrated events never happen in reality; rather, they happen in the narrator's mind.

In attempting to determine what constitutes the Machadian fantastic, this study follows Batalha's suggestion: "Mais prudente seria considerarmos o conceito em seu plural—'fantásticos'" (18). And while unable to offer a comprehensive analysis of the fantastic in all Brazilian works, this study seeks to identify aspects of the fantastic that appears in Machadian texts. To do so, we will use Tavares's aforementioned definition of the fantastic as "tudo que não é" and "tudo que não pode acontecer" (8). To many, only a few of Machado de Assis's short stories qualify as belonging to the fantastic genre. This is largely because, as Marcelo Fernandes states, "nos contos fantásticos machadianos, não há a justificativa/explicação para os 'fenômenos' narrados; são dissolvidas, quase sempre, pelo simples despertar da personagem." Here I caution readers to not get tripped up on Todorov's strict limitations as to what qualifies as fantastic, and I appeal to Eric Rabkin's suggestion that we "consider narratives as arrayed along a continuum, ordered in terms of increasing use of the fantastic" (28). Thus, some of the Machadian stories analyzed in this study ("Sem olhos," for example) may appear more fantastic than others (such as "A cartomante"). Using a variety of stories from different points along this continuum is helpful, however, as we attempt to gain a deeper understanding of Machado's fantastic and how Machadian women function in this genre. That which "não pode acontecer" is

different for each person—including narrators, characters, and readers alike—so it follows that there will be some contradictions from one text to another. But Adolfo Bioy Casares, an Argentine writer of fantastic fiction who also collaborated with Borges in compiling the 1940 *Antología de la literatura fantástica*, avers: “No hay un tipo, sino muchos, de cuentos fantásticos. Habrá que indagar las leyes generales para cada tipo de cuento y las leyes especiales para cada cuento” (8). To this end, the following chapters group texts together in terms of their “leyes generales,” with special emphasis on the female tropes found therein, also examining the “leyes especiales” applicable to each trope and each individual story.

### Selection of Stories

In contemplating which stories to include in this study, I consulted other scholars’ lists of which Machadian stories fall into the realm of the fantastic.<sup>10</sup> I then looked for those fantastic stories in which women figure most prominently. In doing so, I applied Dixon’s explanation that in Machado’s works, the “indecisão” and “dúvida” about what is real and what is not is sometimes experienced by the character, sometimes by the reader, and sometimes by both (52). Based on these criteria, I selected the following stories: “Bagatela,” “O anjo das donzelas,” “O

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<sup>10</sup> Raimundo Magalhães, Jr., includes the following eleven stories in his anthology *Machado de Assis: Contos fantásticos*: “O imortal” (1862), “O anjo Rafael” (1869), “O Capitão Mendonça” (1870), “A vida eterna” (1870), “Decadência de dois grandes homens” (1873), “Os óculos de Pedro Antão” (1874), “Um esqueleto” (1875), “Sem olhos” (1876), “A mulher pálida” (1881), “A chinela turca” (1882), and “A segunda vida” (1884). In his 2003 study “Machado de Assis: Quase-macabro,” Marcelo J. Fernandes adds several more stories to this list: “O país das quimeras” (1862), along with its rewrite, “Uma excursão milagrosa” (1866); “Rui de Leão” (1872, a rewrite of his 1862 story “O imortal”), “O anjo das donzelas” (1864), “Mariana” (1871 version), “A chinela turca” (1875 version), and “Um sonho e outro sonho” (1892). Braulio Tavares includes the story “As academias de Sião” to his 2003 collection *Páginas de sombra: Contos fantásticos brasileiros*. Darlan de Oliveira Gusmão Lula includes all of the previously mentioned stories (whether in their first or second versions) in his master’s thesis *Machado de Assis e o gênero fantástico: Um estudo de narrativas machadianas*.

anjo Rafael,” “A vida eterna,” “O Capitão Mendonça,” “Um esqueleto,” “Sem olhos,” “A cartomante,” “Um sonho e outro sonho,” and the 1896 version of “Mariana.”<sup>11</sup>

“Sem olhos” is perhaps the only Machadian story that fully satisfies Todorov’s restrictive definition of the fantastic, because the narrator sees the apparition of a dead woman with no eyes, with no logical explanation as to why or how he has this vision. As previously mentioned, however, we will consider these stories on a continuum of the fantastic. “O anjo das donzelas,” “A vida eterna,” “O Capitão Mendonça,” and “Mariana” all contain supernatural events or characters who turn out to be part of a dream. Despite these stories’ ending, as Fernandes points out, “pelo simples despertar da personagem,” they are fantastic to the characters—and to the reader—for most of the story. “Um sonho e outro sonho” also relies heavily on dreams, and while we know from the beginning that Genoveva is dreaming when her deceased husband visits her, the story nevertheless depicts her uncertainty as to what is real and what is not. “O anjo Rafael” and “Um esqueleto” both include mysterious elements and explicitly mention the German fantastic author E. T. A. Hoffmann, clearly invoking the fantastic mode.<sup>12</sup> “Bagatela” and “A cartomante” likewise contains apparently inexplicable, mysterious events.<sup>13</sup> Rabkin’s comment is important in illuminating why these last four stories can be considered along with other more obviously fantastic Machadian stories: “The occurrence of the anti-expected can be

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<sup>11</sup> I exclude “As academias de Sião” from this study because, although the female character Kinnara has a major role in the story, it is allegorical—from the very beginning of the story the narrator tells us that it is not to be taken literally: “Conhecem as academias de Sião? Bem sei que em Sião nunca houve academias: mas suponhamos que sim, e que eram quatro, e escutem-me.”

<sup>12</sup> In “O anjo Rafael” the narrator states that the story “tinha ares de um conto de Hoffmann.” In “Um esqueleto,” the narrator remarks that as Alberto begins his story, “estava-se em pleno Hoffmann.”

<sup>13</sup> Writing about “A cartomante,” Paul Dixon states the following: “A ‘coisa misteriosa e verdadeira’ no conto não é a cartomante, pois ela acaba sendo exposta como apenas uma aguda observadora, sem capacidade psíquica. O verdadeiro mistério no conto é a mentalidade de Camilo, que é seduzida por suas próprias esperanças, passando em poucos minutos de um estado de agnosticismo a uma condição de credulidade perigosa” (11). The actual events of the story are not fantastic to the reader, but to Camilo they are.



fantastic even if it takes place in a work that is not itself a fantasy” (10). Although the works analyzed in this study range from resembling the gothic to the Todorovian fantastic, all of them include some form of the fantastic and give us insight into the role women play in Machado’s fantastic. Carefully analyzing these stories will show that, despite their chauvinist appearance, they powerfully denounce the rigid patriarchal system of his time. Through these texts, Machado highlights the crippling effects of patriarchal thinking and calls for fundamental change in Brazilian society.

## CHAPTER 1: THE *FEMME FRAGILE*

### Introduction

The following chapters examine women's roles in Machado's fantastic short stories, identifying various tropes to describe their function. Chapter 1 examines the tropes *woman as foil for rational man* and *woman as manipulable possession*, while Chapter 2 focuses on the tropes *woman as siren* and *woman as fantastic other*. Identifying female tropes has long been a part of literary studies, and, as mentioned above, several scholars have studied Machado's novelistic women in this light. As stated before, however, they have largely neglected Machado's fantastic short stories.<sup>14</sup> In spite of this, these critics' insights about female characters in his novels often apply to women in his fantastic stories as well. Ingrid Stein, for example, writes the following in her book *Figuras femininas em Machado de Assis*:

Na literatura europeia do final do século XIX encontra-se com frequência um tipo de figura feminina caracterizado exteriormente pela suavidade, beleza, alvura, quase transparência. Trata-se de um ser frágil, lânguido, melancólico, doentio, necessitado de repouso e com a força de vontade um tanto paralisada, incapaz para a vida e vindo geralmente a sucumbir a ela: uma figura diáfana, etérea, em relação à qual igualmente não se fazem alusões à sexualidade—questão por demais real para seu delicado mundo. . . . Este tipo de personagem foi denominado *femme fragile*—em oposição a outro, muito difundido na literatura

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<sup>14</sup> Eduardo Melo França discusses women's roles in Machado's early short stories, but does not examine any of his fantastic stories. Aline Sobreira de Oliveira, on the other hand, identifies multiple tropes in the fantastic fiction of Machado, including the idea of journeys, dreams/hallucinations, visions, and fantastic science, but none of them focus explicitly on women.

européia do final do século passado, a *femme fatale*, este ligado à vida, aquele  
mais à morte. (112)

Although Stein focuses primarily on the idea of the *femme fragile* in her analysis of Machado's works (including the figures of Raquel in *Ressurreição* and Flora in *Esau e Jacó*), others of Machado's novelistic women—most notably Capitu—could certainly be seen as *femmes fatales* who lead men to ruin. My tropes are explorations of these two stereotypes. The tropes in Chapter 1 relate to the image of the *femme fragile*, while those in Chapter 2 fit within the concept of the *femme fatale*.

The *femmes fragiles* of this chapter embody the frailty typical of other women assigned to this stereotype. In defining the term *femme fragile*, Friederike Emonds explains that the term embodies “morbid fragility and sickliness, on one hand, and decorative artificiality and sterile beauty, on the other.” They often have a terminal illness that leads them to an early yet beautiful death. Emonds identifies Poe's characters Ligeia and Eleonora as *femmes fragiles*, as well as Beatrice, from Dante's *La Divina Commedia* (165). Ophelia, from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, is another famous example of the *femme fragile*, a beautiful woman who goes mad and suffers an early death. Many women cast in this light resemble children in that they are naïve and incapable of facing the harsh realities of life (Emonds 165). In the Machadian works examined in this chapter, these women are subject to the patriarchal impositions of Brazilian society. Their weakness and death (often the result of male oppression) seem to contrast sharply with the strength and vitality of men. An analysis of these Machadian *femmes fragiles*, however, reveals that their male counterparts are often no stronger than they are, often succumbing to the same naïve thought processes and encountering tragic consequences as a result. Furthermore, many female characters prove to be more logical than their male companions, thus undermining the

patriarchal illusion of male superiority that permeated nineteenth-century Brazil and revealing the need for social change.

### Woman as Foil for Rational Man

One of the most prominent manifestations of the *femme fragile* stereotype in Machado's fantastic stories is the trope of *woman as foil for rational man*. The juxtaposition of male rationality with female superstition is most apparent in "A cartomante," "O anjo Rafael," "O anjo das donzelas," and "Um sonho e outro sonho." In these stories, there are no explicitly female narrators; they are either clearly identified as male, or else, as in the case of "O anjo das donzelas," they adopt a masculine tone. As a result, the only access to these women's thoughts and behaviors comes to us through the male perspective, which often minimizes male deficiencies and accentuates female flaws. What Duncan writes about the fantastic in general holds true for these specific stories as well: men assume an air of "authority, knowledge, solidity, and sound judgment" while they present their female counterparts as exhibiting "confusion, strangeness, or vapidness" (135). In the stories below, Rita, Celestina, Cecília, and Genoveva all make choices based on their superstitious natures. These decisions provoke the criticism of their male companions and cause them to appear as ingenuous and irrational, in contrast to the men in the stories, who classify themselves as models of rational thinking. Despite the apparent rift between male rationality and female credulity in these stories, a careful reading reveals that both men and women can adopt superstition or reason, and that in Brazilian society men are often the source of the superstition they so emphatically denounce.

In "A cartomante," Rita's superstitious behavior initially contrasts with Camilo's logical actions, but Camilo ultimately falls prey to the irrationality he so strongly condemns. This story tells of the adulterous relationship between Camilo and Rita. Worried by a decrease in the

number of Camilo's visits, Rita consults a fortune-teller and is ridiculed by Camilo for doing so. Camilo, who receives several anonymous notes condemning his relationship with Rita, later vacillates between trusting in reason and believing in the supernatural.<sup>15</sup> Frightened by a note requesting that he go to Vilela's house, Camilo visits the fortune-teller, who tells him everything will be all right. He confidently arrives at the house only to be shot and killed by Vilela, who has just killed Rita as well. When Rita explains, near the beginning of the story, that she visited the fortune-teller, Camilo immediately criticizes her for her superstition. He asks, "Tu crês de veras nessas coisas?"<sup>16</sup> Camilo, who prides himself on his logical nature, looks down on Rita and out of pity decides not to "arrancar-lhe as ilusões." Camilo had once been like Rita, but when he turned twenty all his ridiculous superstitions disappeared. Now, "Camilo não acreditava em nada"; when confronted with "mistério," he simply shrugs his shoulders and carries on. Rita, on the other hand, exaggerates and accepts the inexplicable as supernatural. The narrator reinforces the difference between Rita and her male counterparts by explaining that Rita is thirty, Vilela twenty-nine and Camilo twenty-six. He adds that Vilela's "porte grave" makes him seem older than his wife, a subtle revelation of Rita's silliness. Even Camilo, who is described as lacking in experience and intuition, is more sensible than Rita. Darlan Lula explains how Rita's beliefs contrast with Camilo's logical thoughts and represent the erroneous thinking of women:

A superstição e a religião são ensinamentos atribuídos à mãe. No momento em que Camilo se livrou da sua influência e foi beber em outras fontes tais como o

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<sup>15</sup> The events of the story may not seem fantastic to the reader, but Camilo perceives them as such because he is unable to find a logical explanation for the notes he receives and for the fortune-teller's apparently supernatural ability to discern his thoughts.

<sup>16</sup> Some of the stories used in this study are only available online. Consequently, I decided to use the online version of all the stories in order to minimize the number of places readers need to look to find them. Additionally, when quoting from these other sources I modernized spelling to comply with the Novo Acordo Ortográfico.

ensino acadêmico, colocou todas as suas lições “na mesma dúvida” e em seguida “em uma só negação total”. Está completo na figura de Camilo o ciclo de pensamento que o homem perfaz, chegando à racionalidade. Machado parece sugerir que a percepção do homem àquela época é diferente da percepção da mulher, envolvida em condicionamentos supersticiosos. (61)

In Camilo’s view, superstition and religion embody all that is naïve in life, and they are embraced and handed down from generation to generation by women. Having arrived at rationality through education, Camilo frees himself from the chains of female superstition, whereas Rita remains shackled to them her whole life.

The irony of “A cartomante” is that Camilo, who places so much importance on logical thought, ultimately relinquishes his academic training in favor of the superstition he learned from his mother. When Vilela summons him, Camilo vacillates between believing and doubting that Vilela has discovered the affair. It does not take long for his apparent rationality (including the correct conclusion that Vilela has discovered the affair) to erode and give way to blind faith in the fortune-teller’s words. His behavior during the consultation reveals the exact opposite of the trope so strongly developed in the beginning of the story. Instead of the woman acting as a foil for the rational man, in this scene it is the man whose gullibility stands in sharp contrast to the woman’s cunning intellect. The fortune-teller manipulates Camilo’s fears and motivates him to lean in close, “para beber uma a uma as palavras.” His payment of five times the usual sum reveals the value he places on her words, and as he reflects on them his childhood beliefs return, “lentas e contínuas.” This return to superstition leads Camilo to his deadly encounter with Vilela and undermines the trope developed so convincingly in the first half of the story. Although men appear to be more rational than women, in the end it becomes clear that superstition is not unique

to women, and that rationality is not unique to men. Both men and women can adopt naïve ideas, and both can develop a rational approach to life. The difference lies not in physiological differences but in the mind of each person.

“O anjo Rafael” supports this notion of irrationality being present in both men’s and women’s minds: Celestina seems to embody naïveté, but the real source of her ingenuousness is her father’s deranged ideas. This story tells of Antero, a man who is on the brink of committing suicide when he is interrupted by a knock at the door. A strange man enters and leads him to the house of Major Tomás, who promises Antero a fortune if he marries his daughter, Celestina. Tomás later claims he is an angel, revealing his madness. Although Antero wants to run away, Celestina’s nurse, Antônia, persuades him to marry Celestina to save her from ignorance. He agrees, and after Tomás’s death, Antero marries Celestina. According to her father, Celestina does not even understand what love is. Her ignorance manifests itself by the question she asks after learning that Antero will be her husband: “Mas o que é marido?” Antero’s mature experience appears in stark contrast to her obliviousness. She rejects Antero’s argument that her father is not an angel and looks forward to their wedding only because it is a “diversão” from her monotonous life. When compared to Antero, Celestina does seem to act as a foil for male rationality, but her naïveté is in reality a reflection of her father’s irrational ideas. Furthermore, Celestina’s nurse, Antônia, possesses the same logic and reason that Antero has. Celestina’s ignorance, “o principal traço do seu caráter,” vanishes once she marries Antero, showing that it was her father’s brainwashing, not her female nature, that bound her to ignorance. This story confirms what “A cartomante” demonstrates: rationality is not an exclusively male trait, and irrationality is embraced (and even perpetuated) by men just as often as by women.

“O anjo das donzelas” depicts Cecília as being the irrational foil for the logical Tibúrcio, her superstition leading her to a wasted life of loneliness. In this story, the beautiful young Cecília dreams that an angel appears and makes her promise never to marry. The angel gives her a ring as a reminder of this vow, with strict instructions never to remove it. Over the next several decades she turns down suitor after suitor, certain that her vision was real. When she is an old woman, her cousin Tibúrcio (who had loved her when they were young) visits her and reveals that her ring used to be his and that he had it placed on her finger one night while she slept. She removes the ring and finds Tibúrcio’s initials inscribed, thus learning that her whole life she believed in a dream that had no basis in reality. Cecília is a naïve girl so caught up in romantic notions and books that she develops a “terror invencível” of love and is convinced she should never fall in love. This decision owes in large measure to her “espírito supersticioso,” which the narrator explicitly condemns because it leads her to make the vow with the supposed angel. According to Lula, this covenant is only possible because Cecília’s spirit is “impregnado de sujeições supersticiosas e de crenças no sobrenatural, contribuindo para isso as suas constantes leituras de novelas que a levavam para um outro mundo, imaginativo e fértil” (59). Caught up as she is in this “outro mundo,” Cecília is blind to the reality of the life before her. Her name fits her personality perfectly because, as Adriana da Costa Teles explains, “Cecília” is based on the Latin *caecus*, meaning “blind.” Teles states: “Cecília, enquanto donzela romântica e ingênua, como é caracterizada, é, antes de qualquer coisa, uma cega para com os fatos da vida e do mundo, reclusa que está em sua alcova a fazer leituras que a conduzem a uma visão romantizada da vida” (163-64). Her constant reading of romantic novels puts her out of touch with the world and with rational ways of thinking. She is blind to the truth that the angel is nothing more than an invention of her credulous mind. As a result, she rejects all who try to court her and loses many



opportunities to have the happiness she so desperately desires. By age thirty-three, she loses “as ilusões dos primeiros tempos” but acquires “outras mais sólidas”—more evidence of her foolish and erroneous thinking. Cecília replays the vision repeatedly in her mind, trying to find comfort and reassurance in her devotion to the vow. Despite her occasional doubts, however, she cannot break free from her superstitious nature and is doomed to loneliness.

In this story Cecília is the opposite of Tibúrcio, who represents the intelligent rationality of men. He provides the logical explanation for Cecília’s dream: he had Cecília’s servant put the ring on her finger while she slept. Even after this explanation, Cecília cannot free herself completely from the superstitions nurtured over the years. When she reveals that she still believes in the angel’s visit, Tibúrcio exclaims, “você quer contestar uma verdade com uma superstição? Ainda acredita em sonhos!” This criticism clearly supports the notion that women are the illogical counterparts to their sensible male companions. Had she thought sensibly, Cecília would have sought a rational explanation for her supposed vision instead of putting stock in “uma coisa toda de imaginação.” As with Rita from “A cartomante,” Cecília’s perception of the world is “envolvida em condicionamentos supersticiosos” (Lula 61). By the time she realizes the misguided nature of her beliefs, however, it is too late—she cannot recover the decades of wasted years. Had Tibúrcio seen such a vision, he would have investigated the matter to discover whether it was real or not. Cecília, on the other hand, blindly accepts the illusions her gullible superstition presents to her. This story offers no immediate challenge to the reality of the *woman as foil for rational man* trope. Unlike “A cartomante” and “O anjo Rafael,” in this story no male character gives in to superstitious thinking, and no female character overcomes superstition with rationality. This apparent reinforcement of the gullible iteration of the *femme fragile* can be partially explained, however, by remembering that Cecília’s superstitions are planted in her mind

by the books she reads. In this time period (as in virtually every other time period before then), books were written mostly by men. Thus, men become the source of many of the superstitions they so harshly criticize when adopted by women. This suggests that men, who so carefully construct an image of male rationality, believe in (or at least value) superstitions and are influenced by them. Although only hinted at in this story, this idea is much more clearly identifiable in “Um sonho e outro sonho.”

In “Um sonho e outro sonho,” Genoveva initially accepts the superstitions created by men, but she overcomes her naïveté by putting stock in reason, demonstrating that women are just as capable of rational thought as men are. In this story, the 24-year-old widow Genoveva slowly overcomes her superstitions and falls in love with a man named Oliveira. Despite multiple dreams in which Genoveva’s first husband warns her not to, she accepts Oliveira’s marriage proposal. In the beginning of the story, Genoveva demonstrates the same blind, superstitious belief that Cecília possesses, exhibited in her habit of looking at her deceased husband’s portrait every night before she retires and every morning when she wakes up, as though she can still communicate with him. The narrator later explains that Genoveva’s behavior is inspired largely by the novel her husband wrote before his death, *A bela do sepulcro*, in which a widow faithfully visits her husband’s grave, refuses an offer of marriage, and soon thereafter joins her beloved companion in death.<sup>17</sup> Genoveva has read her husband’s novel “mais de vinte vezes, e nada achava tão patético nem mais natural.” Bolstered by the book’s romantic sentiments, her stubborn superstition prevails for much of the story. The result of this superstition is a dream in which her late husband appears, accusing her of forgetting him and of

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<sup>17</sup> The narrator’s critique of this novel is clearly a stab at romantic ideals and stories, similar to what appears in “O anjo das donzelas” when the narrator warns against the power of romantic novels in cultivating dangerous ideas in young women’s minds.

falling in love with Oliveira. The ghost makes Genoveva swear to cut off her relationship with Oliveira, pleading with her not to defile the love she has for him by letting another man enter her life.<sup>18</sup> She heeds his ominous warning and believes so firmly in her husband's words that they become "determinativas do seu proceder." The narrator states, "Ela cria em sonhos; tinha para si que eles eram avisos, consolações e castigos."

Like Cecília, Genoveva is naïve and gullible, as evidenced by her willingness to believe in dreams and deny herself happiness because of a supposed vow. Later on, her superstition takes form again when her late husband appears in a second dream and promises that she will die if she marries Oliveira. Unlike Cecília, however, Genoveva recognizes her dreams for what they are: a product of superstition. As she overcomes her irrational beliefs her fear subsides, and when she reflects on her experience she states simply, "São sonhos." The narrator's final words reveal his approval of this change in her nature: "Casou e não morreu." Had she continued being the credulous woman she was in the beginning of the story, she would have denied herself the happiness of marrying Oliveira. Like Cecília, she would have been lonely all her life. The difference, however, is that she does break free of her ignorance and naïveté. As Marli Cardoso dos Santos writes, it is only after Genoveva is able to "se libertar do medo causado por seus sonhos" that she is able to have "uma vida normal" (118). Cecília, however, does not break free of her ignorance until it is too late. This story does not end as the others in this section do, but it does reinforce the idea that women are irrational by nature and that only rarely do they break free from that weakness. Inherent in this critique, however, is a hypocritical condemnation of romantic ideals. Genoveva does put stock in superstition for a time, but she does so only because

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<sup>18</sup> This scene is reminiscent of Cecília's vision in "O anjo das donzelas," in which she takes the angel as her husband and vows never to marry anyone. In Genoveva's case, however, the angel is her deceased husband.

her husband wrote such a romanticized story. Had her husband not planted such dramatic notions in her mind, Genoveva would have arrived at rationality sooner. Similarly, if men had not filled the books Cecília read with such exaggerated conceptions of love, she would not have been afraid of falling in love and would not have felt the need to make the vow to the angel. Genoveva's credulity comes from her husband's book, proving what is only implied in "O anjo das donzelas": men are often the source of the superstition they denounce.

In each of these stories men perceive women as inferior to men in their capacity to think reasonably, but many of these male characters are shown to exhibit the same credulous tendencies they criticize in women. In attempting to distance themselves from female thinking, these men adopt the view of women so prevalent in Machado's time: "Nenhum espírito racional rondava-lhes as cabeças, pelo contrário, elas recebiam os ensinamentos das mães a serem devotas, crentes na fé, viviam às rodas com as mucamas, ouvindo-lhes fervorosas crenças em manifestações sobrenaturais" (Lula 60). Because they are so wrapped up in superstition, they are devoid of any ability to think rationally. They represent the epitome of the *femme fragile* who is "weak, helpless, and sickly" (Emonds 166). Their "sickly" nature does not result from physical malady, however, as is common with other *femmes fragiles* in literature. These women's sickness is mental. They are incapable of thinking for themselves and must depend on men to know what to do. As a result, they are ridiculed by the apparently strong men in their lives—Camilo criticizes Rita for her childish fears in "A cartomante," Tibúrcio disparages Cecília for valuing superstition over reason in "O anjo das donzelas," and the narrator points out Genoveva's superstition as the cause of her anxiety in "Um sonho e outro sonho." The men in these stories seek to distance themselves from the superstitious attitudes of women, but in the end they often prove to be just as susceptible to them as women are. Likewise, the women in

these stories often employ reason to at least the same extent men do. In the case of “A cartomante,” the astute fortune-teller contrasts sharply with the outwardly skeptical but inwardly credulous Camilo. In “O anjo das donzelas,” “O anjo Rafael,” and “Um sonho e outro sonho,” the source of women’s ingenuousness is the men in their lives. In the case of Celestina and Genoveva, these women embrace rational thought when they encounter it, leaving their superstitions behind. Each of these stories initially appears to vindicate the chauvinist perception of woman as foil for rational man, a type of *femme fragile* dependent on male rationality for progress. Fitz concedes that similar conclusions can be drawn from Machado’s novels, but he points out that this interpretation of Machado is superficial and incomplete: “[Machado’s] major female characters do serve, in a sense, as foils to many of his male characters. Or, it might be argued, his famous male characters (‘Dom Casmurro,’ for instance, or Félix) can be read as foils to his female characters (Capitu, for example, or Guiomar)” (205). The trope *woman as foil for rational man* is certainly present in the fantastic stories analyzed in this section, but it is almost always problematized and subverted by the behavior of the very men who view women as inferior. Despite their claims of rationality, these men’s foolish behavior leads them to function as foils for rational women. This dismantles one aspect of the *femme fragile* stereotype by suggesting that, as a whole, women are intellectually equal to men. There are certainly individual exceptions to this idea (Cecília being one of the most prominent in Machado’s fantastic fiction), but several of Machado’s stories reveal that men, too, can fall prey to superstition (Camilo, from “A cartomante,” is a prime example of this). The differences in these characters, then, seem more linked to their personalities than to their sex. When considered together these stories appear to be, more than anything, a critique of the romantic ideas and superstition perpetuated by men and women alike, regardless of which sex embraces them. Adopting this erroneous way of thinking

leads Cecília to a life of loneliness, Camilo to his death, and many others to suffering and delayed happiness. These stories clearly criticize superstition and credulousness, but perhaps the most irrational notion they denounce is the assumption that women are by nature inferior to men.

### Woman as Manipulable Possession

In addition to being presented by their male counterparts as naïve, another way in which Machado's female characters ostensibly fit into the *femme fragile* stereotype is through the trope *woman as manipulable possession*. Women in these fantastic short stories frequently function as male property. Isabel Cristina Hentz writes the following about Machado's short stories: "As mulheres eram sempre 'de alguém': filha de fulano, esposa de beltrano. . ." (8). They have no identity without the men who own them, and to whom they are subjected. This view of women also appears in Machado's realist fiction. In *Dom Casmurro*, for example, Bento authoritatively tells Capitu how much of her arms to show in public, acting as a master with the right to dictate her every move. Another example comes from *Quincas Borba*, in which Maria Benedita, according to Maria Manuel Lisboa, must become an "object-wife" in order to please her husband (169). She must renounce her independence if she is to please the man who gives her social status. "Missa do galo" contains a similar view of women in that Conceição's husband has no qualms about sleeping with another woman, and even though Conceição knows of the affair, she can do nothing about it. Beyond simply appearing in Machado's fiction, this attitude toward women was widespread in nineteenth-century Brazil, in which "a mulher ocupava na família uma posição secundária, inferior à do homem" (Stein 23). The woman was responsible for bearing children, keeping the house in order, and receiving her husband's guests. According to Fitz, the Brazilian man of Machado's day was the "absolute, unquestioned master, or 'senhor,' of the family" (10). With this in mind, it is obvious that the *woman as manipulable possession* trope

emerges in both fiction and reality. Although this trope is not Machado's invention, in his fantastic fiction it finds its most extreme expression. This is the case in "O anjo Rafael," "A vida eterna," "Sem olhos," "Um esqueleto," and "O Capitão Mendonça," in which women are valued only for their beauty, their wealth, or their subservience to male desire. But while these stories portray women as manipulable possessions, they simultaneously reveal male manipulability and expose this merchandising perception of women for what it is: an illusion of control bred by male anxiety.

Celestina, from "O anjo Rafael," clearly functions as the main manipulable possession in the hands of both her father and her fiancée, but an analysis of Antero's behavior reveals that he, too, is manipulated throughout the story. During Antero's first meeting with his future father-in-law, Tomás offers his only daughter to Antero with no thought for her choice in the matter. Almost immediately, Antero himself begins to see her as her father does—as an object, a potential possession. Although initially opposed to marrying her, he reconsiders when he contemplates what she might add to his situation in life: "se fosse bonita; se tivesse uma fortuna, que mal havia em se casar ele com ela?" At this point, Antero views Celestina not as a woman to love, but as a trophy to collect. Celestina's question upon meeting Antero reveals her submission to her father: "Este senhor é o que vai ser meu marido?" Apparently content to allow her father to determine her fate, she does not question his judgment or Antero's character. Her manipulability reveals itself even more when Antero asks Celestina if she wants to marry him. She responds, "certamente que sim; gosto do senhor; além disso, meu pai quer, e quando um anjo quer. . . ." To Celestina, it seems, going against her father's wishes is unthinkable. It is only after Celestina marries Antero that she overcomes the ignorance that was "o principal traço do seu caráter," along with the outlandish ideas her father had instilled in her. Here Antero, the

rational man, “saves” Celestina by marrying her and doing for her what she cannot do for herself—helping her overcome her foolishness. In addition to saving her from ignorance, Antero gives Celestina a future by marrying her. In nineteenth-century Brazil, marriage was “the only truly acceptable social end for a woman and the only form of social ascension available for women of the middle classes” (Ferreira-Pinto 33). Without marriage, women of the time had no social importance. Thus, Celestina’s marriage allows her to have a future. Although ostensibly a positive change, the marriage nevertheless results from the man manipulating the woman. Celestina conforms (in thought and in action) to whoever is her “owner”—first her father, and then her new husband. If she were to pass to the ownership of another man, it is likely she would adopt his way of thinking as well, just as she does when she moves from Tomás’s to Antero’s possession. She is the *femme fragile* par excellence, a fragile creature who depends on men for her survival. Her name, which means “heavenly,” points to her ethereal nature and suggests that the perfect woman is just as she is—malleable and submissive. Celestina, however, is not the only manipulable character in the story. Indeed, the first instance of manipulation in the story does not even involve a woman. Summoned to a strange house with no explanation other than the possibility of inheriting a fortune, Antero abandons the suicidal plan on which he had been bent moments earlier. He is easily manipulated by the promise of money, with no evidence that the reward is genuine. After being kept as a prisoner at Tomás’s house for several days (more evidence of his role as an object rather than as a man), Antero finally meets Tomás. The old man addresses him with the same controlling tone he uses with Celestina and likewise gives Antero no real choice regarding the arranged marriage, dismissing his objections as soon as he voices them. Furthermore, Tomás uses Celestina’s beauty as a tool to coerce Antero into marrying her, and Antero succumbs to the manipulation. Although subtle, these details indicate that Tomás



manipulates Antero in the same way he controls Celestina. In this story, the man functions as a manipulable possession just as much as the woman does.

Like Celestina, Eusébia is manipulated by her controlling father in “A vida eterna” and viewed as a possession by both men in the story. But while Antero is only verbally pressured into marrying Celestina in “O anjo Rafael,” in this story Camilo is forced to marry Eusébia to escape death. In this story, Camilo is startled when Tobias enters his house unannounced and states that if he does not marry his daughter, Eusébia, he will shoot him. Camilo accompanies Tobias to his house, marries Eusébia, and is then killed and cut into pieces by Tobias. After dying, Camilo hears Tobias and his companions talking about how to carry out a cannibalistic ceremony designed to give them eternal life. At the end of the story, Camilo wakes up and realizes the whole thing was a dream. In this story, as in “O anjo Rafael,” the male protagonist is manipulated before the woman even appears—Tobias’s death threat forces Camilo to agree to marry his daughter. In the very moment of his own manipulation, Camilo views Eusébia as a manipulable possession as well, which reveals the extent to which this perception of women is rooted in his mind. Aside from avoiding death, Camilo rationalizes to himself, “Se ela fosse, como eu imaginava, uma beleza, e além do mais riquíssima, que poderia exigir da sorte?” He is not as interested in her personality as he is in her beauty and riches, revealing his commoditizing view of women. Eusébia submits herself to her father’s desires completely, stating that her father “não podia escolher melhor marido” for her and that she hopes she can measure up to Camilo’s merits, expressing no hint of doubt as to Camilo’s character. Although she does not want to act as bait in her father’s cannibalistic plan, she says of herself: “eu sou apenas um instrumento passivo nas mãos de todos esses homens.” She sees herself (as does her father) as powerless to oppose him. This is evidenced by the fact that she loses four husbands (one each year) prior to

marrying Camilo without demanding an explanation from her father, the man obviously responsible for their disappearances. She seeks to absolve herself from guilt by telling Camilo, “Aquilo que lhe disse foi-me ensinado.” In luring Camilo in, Eusébia did exactly what her father taught her to do, never questioning whether it was right or wrong. When Tobias discovers that Eusébia has told Camilo what his fate will be, Tobias has her killed. This ruthless act is strong evidence that Tobias sees Eusébia not as a daughter to love, but as dispensable bait to callously use for his own benefit.

Although Tobias and Camilo view Eusébia as a manipulable possession, some of her actions contradict this simplistic perception of her. That Eusébia tells Camilo about his impending doom is an act of defiance, even if a small one. In this act she defies her father’s will and challenges the notion that women are completely manipulable and weak by nature. This is the most visible sign of her resistance, but it is reasonable to assume that this one act of defiance was preceded by many thoughts of rebellion, just as Camilo’s outward acceptance of Tobias’s proposition comes after many frantic attempts to think of a way to escape. In this respect, Camilo and Eusébia are both manipulated—they both comply with Tobias’s plan because they face death should they refuse. Camilo is compelled to marry Eusébia first by Tobias’s threat and then by Eusébia’s beauty. Eusébia does not function solely as the object of manipulation in this story, however; she also manipulates Camilo. Thus the woman of the story, viewed by her father and fiancée as a piece of property, becomes the master who dictates the behavior of the male protagonist. This idea will be developed in greater detail in the next section, but it is an important

aspect of the story that should not be overlooked, as it problematizes the view that women are manipulated by men but not vice-versa.<sup>19</sup>

In “Sem olhos,” both Lucinda’s domineering husband and Damasceno view Lucinda as manipulable, but through her death she weakens the power of their dominance. In this story, Cruz tells of his encounter with Damasceno, his half-crazy neighbor. After a few conversations, Damasceno relates a tragic story to Cruz. Damasceno fell in love with Lucinda (a married woman), but she was always careful not to look into his eyes for fear of falling in love with him as well. When she finally looks longingly into Damasceno’s eyes, her jealous husband discovers them and later burns out her eyes. On the night Damasceno dies from illness, Cruz sees Lucinda’s ghost, an image that haunts him for the rest of his life.

Before Damasceno tells Cruz of his relationship with Lucinda, he cautions Cruz never to look at his neighbor’s wife. He then adds, “Sobretudo não a obrigue a olhar para o senhor.” This comment suggests that Damasceno coerced Lucinda to look at him against her will, a subtle revelation of her manipulability. When her husband discovers them, the fragile Lucinda faints, afraid of how her overbearing husband will punish her. After Damasceno hears she is deathly ill he returns to visit her, “resoluto a saber tudo e a salvar a vida da inocente, se fosse possível.” This statement is another indication of the male perception of female subservience—Damasceno thinks he may have the power to save her life, whereas if left to herself she will certainly die. Although he is trying to improve her situation, he nonetheless views her as a manipulable object subject to male power. The story’s most shocking manifestation of the *woman as manipulable*

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<sup>19</sup> Further evidence of women manipulating men appears in “A cartomante.” As alluded to before, the female fortune-teller manipulates Camilo by her cunning words, which ultimately lead him to his death. This story provides clear proof that women are not the only ones manipulated in Machado’s fiction. The trope *woman as siren* in Chapter Two provides more evidence of this idea.

*possession* trope, however, is the way Lucinda's husband punishes his subservient wife. Because of his jealous nature, he resolves to "castigar-lhe simplesmente os olhos" by burning them out with a hot piece of iron. That he feels he has the right to inflict such horrific mutilation shows that he sees Lucinda more as property than as companion, especially since she and Damasceno shared nothing more than a glance. Encapsulating the classic fate of the *femme fragile*, Lucinda dies soon after this traumatizing experience.

The story's events would powerfully reinforce the tradition of female inferiority and compliance so widespread in Machado's time, were it not for a few key moments in the text. Lucinda's husband, the epitome of male domination and strength, cannot control her every move. Although she lives in fear, she nonetheless risks one glance at Damasceno. Her motivation for looking at Damasceno is unimportant; what matters is that in doing so she defies the wishes of her husband, who is her primary manipulator. As in "A vida eterna," in this story the woman finds a way to resist manipulation. Like Eusébia's, Lucinda dies because of her insubordination, but she does so as a martyr, calling attention to the rigid patriarchal society in which she lives. These two women embody what Lisboa identifies as a central theme in Machado's fiction: empowering women by exposing their disempowerment in a patriarchal society. Lisboa writes, "Before the female voice can be heard, its silence, and the modes by which it was imposed, must be made visible" (32). The brutal silencing of women's voices in "A vida eterna" and "Sem olhos" is a powerful manifestation of the repression of female ideas and independence, spurring readers to question the justice of such an oppressive patriarchal society.

The ruthless punishment of an innocent woman is even more glaring in "Um esqueleto." In this story, Alberto (the narrator) tells his friends about his interactions with Dr. Belém. An eccentric man, Belém convinces Marcelina to marry him, after which he reveals that he keeps the

skeleton of his late wife in his house. To Marcelina and Alberto's horror, Belém carries the skeleton around with him and eventually runs off into the forest with it, after accusing Marcelina and Alberto of betraying his trust and telling them to get married.<sup>20</sup> Belém's first wife—the skeleton referred to in the story's title—is certainly a possession incapable of acting for herself. When Alberto first sees her, she is resting in a glass case, suggesting that Belém views her as a trophy. Belém's comment that when Marcelina dies he will place her skeleton beside his first wife's further illustrates his twisted view of women. In the dinner scene, the skeleton is seated “com os braços sobre a mesa.” In order for her to be in this position, Belém must physically manipulate her bones. She has no power in and of herself and can only move if her husband maneuvers her. Belém attempts to control Marcelina in a similar way, although he does so by fear rather than by physical manipulation. His revelation that he killed his first wife (mistakenly thinking she had been unfaithful to him) reflects an attitude toward women similar to that of Lucinda's husband in “Sem olhos”—the man assumes he can punish the woman as he likes. Indeed, Belém keeps the skeleton around partially so that Marcelina never forgets “seus deveres.” Although he regrets killing his innocent wife, he assures his new wife that should he ever suspect her of infidelity he will not seek confirmation of his suspicions: “farei justiça por minhas mãos.” Stein provides insight into this mentality when she states that from 1603 until 1830 Brazilian law allowed for a husband to kill his wife if she was unfaithful to him.<sup>21</sup> Although this story presumably takes place several decades after the law was changed, the

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<sup>20</sup> This story falls on the gothic end of the fantastic spectrum. Belém's interactions with the skeleton, although grotesque, are not impossible. However, that Machado is invoking the fantastic mode is evident by the narrator's comment as Alberto begins his story: “Estava-se em pleno Hoffmann.”

<sup>21</sup> This comes from the legal code *Ordenações Filipinas*, originally instituted by Filipe II of Spain during the Iberian Union (1580–1640) and enforced until 1830. Brazil was of course a Portuguese colony until 1822, and was therefore subject to Portuguese law.

patriarchal sentiments reinforced by this law were certainly still alive and well. Stein adds: “O adultério masculino é determinado pela existência comprovada de uma ‘concubina teúda e manteúda’, bastando para o feminino, com base no texto vago da lei, nada mais que ‘indícios’” (29). This unfair treatment of men and women under the law shows echoes of the trope of *woman as manipulable possession* in Brazilian society as a whole, allowing husbands to punish their wives with no real proof of adultery.<sup>22</sup> Influenced by these ideas, Belém threatens Marcelina in an attempt to force her into submission and mold her into the manipulable woman he wants her to be. Whenever Marcelina interacts with him she shows her disgust and unwillingness to comply, but she never dares refuse, fearing what Belém might do to her.

The final scene of the story highlights Belém’s view of women as manipulable possessions and, at the same time, reveals the inadequacy of portraying them as such. Before vanishing into the woods with the skeleton (and with no thought of honoring his marital vows), Belém simply passes Marcelina off to Alberto as if giving him a donation. Having given up his most recently acquired “possession,” Belém feels no more responsibility to support her. His decision to devote his life to the skeleton rather than to his living wife reveals something important about Belém: he recognizes that the completely submissive woman is nothing more than an illusion. He believes that, despite his threats, Marcelina has fallen in love with Alberto. Whether or not this is true is not as important as Belém’s perception of the situation. In his mind, his efforts to control Marcelina have failed. Her resistance, however small, challenges the central goal of patriarchal ways of thinking. According to Dixon, “A obsessão masculina é abraçar, possuir, e nunca perder a posse da mulher. E seu maior medo, talvez, seja que ela não se deixe

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<sup>22</sup> Similar treatment of the supposedly unfaithful wife appears in “O anjo Rafael” and *Dom Casmurro*. Whereas Belém kills his unfaithful wife, in these stories the wife is banished, constituting a figurative murder as the husband removes her from his life and support forever.

possuir por completo, que se transforme numa substância diferente do que se esperava, que se revele esquiva, inconstante ou fugidia” (25-26). Belém, convinced that Marcelina does not completely submit to his will, chooses the skeleton because he knows that Marcelina—or any other woman, for that matter—will never yield entirely to him, whereas the skeleton will. Only the shriveled form of a woman, with no muscles and no brain, is utterly manipulable. Real women prove to be “inconstante[s] ou figidia[s].” This story, which seems to contain the paragon of manipulable women in the figure of Belém’s first wife, subtly subverts the possibility of total female subservience and reveals that only a pseudo-woman can satisfy the unrealistic expectations of a patriarchal society.

Perhaps the most compelling example of woman as manipulable possession is that of Augusta in “O Capitão Mendonça,” in which the perfect, subservient female is not a woman at all, but a product of male ego. In this story, Amaral is approached by Capitão Mendonça while at the theater. Mendonça leads Amaral to his house and introduces him to his daughter, Augusta. Proud to show off his daughter’s beauty, Mendonça pulls her glass eyes out of her head, revealing that Augusta is in fact an automaton. Although frightened by Mendonça, Amaral is enamored of Augusta and returns to their house day after day. Telling Amaral that he is not yet worthy of his daughter’s hand, Mendonça explains that he will surgically insert a chemical mixture into his brain, turning him into a genius and thus making him eligible to marry her. When Amaral resists, Mendonça immobilizes him and bores open his skull. The story ends when Amaral awakens and learns that it was all a dream.<sup>23</sup> In this story, which resembles (and

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<sup>23</sup> His behavior at the very end of the story relates to the *woman as foil for rational man* trope and shows that men can be just as superstitious as women. Although Amaral knows the real Mendonça is not the one from his dream, he cannot overcome his superstition and consequently ignores Mendonça’s invitation to visit him. The

explicitly mentions) Hoffmann's "The Sandman," Augusta has no identity aside from being a creation of Capitão Mendonça. Her relationship with him provides further evidence of her status as manipulable possession rather than independent woman: "Via-se bem que o amor era realçado pelo orgulho; havia no olhar do capitão uma certa altivez que em geral não acompanha a ternura paterna. *Não era um pai, era um autor*" (emphasis added). Augusta's history also reinforces this relationship. Mendonça explains that the Augusta sitting before Amaral is the fourth of his attempts to create the perfect woman. Unsatisfied with the first three products, Mendonça simply reduced them to their "estado primitivo" and tried again. He dismantled the third Augusta because she was not vain enough for Mendonça's liking. The idea that women can be melted down and reshaped by a skilled artisan is nothing short of viewing women as possessions that can be manipulated, undone, and reshaped at will by male intellect and genius.

Mendonça is very proud of Augusta—not for her being an independent woman but for being living proof of his brilliance. Laura Marafante, in a study comparing this story with Hoffmann's, calls attention to Augusta's power to express herself as evidence of her autonomy. She claims that Olimpia (Hoffmann's automaton) is much more representative of the stereotypical woman of Machado's period: "comedida, calada, manipulada" (7). After all, it is Augusta, not Mendonça, who states that Amaral needs to be a genius to be worthy of her love. However, Mendonça's wording when explaining this to Amaral reveals Augusta's lack of genuine independence: "Trata se de uma condição *lembrada* por minha filha" (emphasis added). Augusta does not create the condition that Amaral be a genius to be worthy of marrying her; she simply reminds Mendonça of what he had already implanted in her. With this in mind, it

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effects of his credulity are not as pronounced as Cecília's is in "O anjo das donzelas," but the subjection of rational thought to superstition is the same.



becomes clear that Augusta's words are nothing more than a reflection of the captain's own vanity, carefully programmed in her. Although Augusta's opinions come from her mouth, they originate in Mendonça's mind. The third Augusta—the one who lacked vanity—likely would not have objected to marrying Amaral even though he was not a genius. The fourth Augusta, constructed more carefully than the others, says what Mendonça would have said because her vanity will not allow her to marry a mediocre man. If she did not behave according to Mendonça's wishes, he would certainly have melted her down and tried again, as he did with the previous three Augustas.

Seeing this final version of Augusta, Amaral comments that she is Mendonça's "obra-prima," to which he simply responds, "Por ora." He then explains that he is planning to create "coisas mais pasmosas." Mendonça does not view Augusta with paternal love; he views her as a possession, a work of art that he will soon surpass with new works of art. Mendonça is not the only one who views Augusta as an object, however; Amaral himself adopts this perception of her: "Augusta era . . . um produto de arte; o saber do autor despojou o tipo humano de suas incorreções para criar um tipo ideal, um exemplar único." Amaral's infatuation with Augusta consumes him and causes him to abandon reason in order to be with Augusta. In this respect, Augusta manipulates Amaral to the same extent that Mendonça manipulates his daughter.<sup>24</sup> Amaral admires the captain's daughter not because she is human, but because she is perfect, as a result of Mendonça's manipulation.<sup>25</sup> Like "Um esqueleto," this story suggests that the

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<sup>24</sup> Augusta's relationship to Amaral is discussed at length in the next chapter. The most important aspect of their relationship for the present trope is the fact that Amaral returns to Mendonça's house day after day, against his better judgment. He is unable to go against Augusta's wishes.

<sup>25</sup> A similar sentiment is expressed in "Bagatela" (1859), this time by the female character. Like "Um esqueleto," this story is on the gothic end of the fantastic continuum, containing strange men and mysterious but explainable events. In this story, Max takes in a poor girl named Gabriela and helps her become independent. Gabriela, who was removed from poverty by Max, reveals her own submission to his helpful—but nonetheless

patriarchal conception of the ideal woman in is not a woman at all. Capitão Mendonça, dissatisfied with human women because of their independence, is only happy when he creates a woman who acts exactly as he wants her to. That he must create an automaton before considering her a perfect “woman” reveals that no human woman is as manipulable as men would like to think. Amaral views Augusta in the same way, seeing her as more beautiful and perfect than human women because she is the product of male imagination. As with “Um esqueleto,” in this story the ideal embodiment of the woman as manipulable possession is not a real woman but a product of man’s ego, and for Mendonça, Amaral, and Belém, the less human the “woman” is—the more manipulable—the better.

In each of these stories, the patriarchal conception of women as manipulable possession is problematized by the behavior of both men and women. Some men attempt to control women by giving them orders and expecting them to obey without question. Even the men who fall in love with and marry these women see them as possessions, valuable primarily for their beauty and money. Cristina Ferreira-Pinto explains that this view of women was common during the nineteenth century: “The expectations placed on a married woman were of submission, obedience, and faithfulness to the husband” (30). When women do not conform to these self-effacing characteristics of the *femme fragile*, their fathers or husbands punish them. On the surface, the female characters in these fantastic stories seem inferior to the male characters, and they are certainly treated as such by their suitors, husbands, and fathers. Men steeped in patriarchal thinking view strong women as a threat and therefore seek to subjugate them in order to preserve the status quo, as Emonds elucidates: “The strength of women is perceived as a threat

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condescending—intervention thus: “Eu não sou senão o que me fizeste.” Just like Augusta, Gabriela is nothing without her male architect.

to a male ego that can constitute itself only in sharp contrast to, and in domination of, the female” (166). Many of Machado’s male protagonists adopt this attitude toward women, but the stories themselves show the problems of such a perspective. Some of these stories, such as “O anjo Rafael,” “A vida eterna,” and “O Capitão Mendonça,” undermine the trope of *woman as manipulable possession* by revealing that men are just as manipulable as women. These three stories accomplish this by showing how the male protagonist is captivated by the woman’s beauty and—although in direct opposition to his instincts—agrees to marry her. All of these men are objects of manipulation, first at the hands of conniving fathers, and then at the hands of their fiancées. Thus, although the *femme fragile* stereotype appears in these stories, it is not advocated but rather problematized. Sometimes these *femmes fragiles* are human (as in the case of Marcelina and Celestina); sometimes they are not (as in the case of Augusta and the skeleton of Belém’s first wife). In each case, men attempt to physically or emotionally manipulate women so they comply with their desires. Some of these stories contain clear critiques of patriarchal thinking, and others simply demonstrate the extent to which patriarchal thinking and female silence pervade society. In each case, however, Lisboa’s interpretation about Machadian women applies: “Machado’s portrayal of women in his fiction corresponds to . . . [an] enterprise of defamation aimed at the ultimate restriction of women socially and morally, and whose operation he seeks to expose” (9). In other words, Machado’s stories show the extent to which women’s voices and rights are repressed in Brazilian society. Although his narrators rarely offer explicit social criticism, they bring to light the “conditions of female voicelessness” in nineteenth-century Brazil, which becomes, according to Lisboa, “the beginning of their empowerment” (32). By demonstrating the terrible things that can happen when men or women follow the path of

patriarchal thinking, these stories provide a subtle illustration of the problems extant in Brazilian society.

These Machadian texts show that no woman fits neatly into the tropes of *woman as foil for rational man* or *woman as manipulable possession* and that it is overly simplistic to reduce his male and female characters to such stereotypes. They suggest that the real world is much more complicated than that. One illustration of this principle is that several women in these stories defy the stereotypical *femme fragile* (the fortune-teller from “A cartomante” and Celestina’s nurse, Antônia, from “O anjo Rafael” being two excellent examples). Similarly, despite the many domineering men in these stories, several male characters appear as *hommes fragiles*, ironically embodying the same traits they condemn when exhibited by women (Camilo, in the second half of “A cartomante,” and Camilo, from “A vida eterna,” fit this description). While the stories analyzed in this chapter appear to support one of two iterations of the *femme fragile* (*woman as foil for rational man* and *woman as manipulable possession*), they subtly call attention to the illusion of male supremacy and suggest that the stereotypical, irrational, manipulable woman is nothing more than a fantasy perpetuated by a threatened patriarchal society seeking to retain its power.

## CHAPTER 2: THE *FEMME FATALE*

### Introduction

Having examined how women appear in Machado's fantastic fiction in the role of *femme fragile*, we now move on to studying them in the light of the *femme fatale* stereotype. Gail Finney claims that this image is "as old as literature" and identifies Helen of Troy as one of the first *femmes fatales*. Sabine Hake identifies Medusa, Lilith, Delilah, Judith, and Salome as other figures who fit into this category (164). The *femme fatale* often appears in the role of siren, witch, or vampire and is a "mysterious, enigmatic, and exotic" female who stimulates male desire but does not satisfy it (Finney 51-52). These figures often seduce men and lead them to suffering and death, with no possibility of escape. Perhaps the most famous of these figures in Machado's fiction is Capitu, whose alleged infidelity destroys Bento Santiago's happiness and pushes him to a solitary, miserable life. In discussing Machado's novelistic women, Lisboa states that Aires misquotes Proudhon in *Esau e Jacó* when he claims that "a mulher é a desolação do homem" because this statement was originally made in reference to prostitutes, not women in general (126). Despite this incomplete recapitulation of Proudhon's ideas, his statement embodies a prevalent perception of women in Machado's fiction. In Aires's mind, as in the minds of so many of Machado's male characters, women are dangerous. The tropes in this chapter, *woman as siren* and *woman as fantastic other*, are linked in that they both seem to echo this evaluation of women as being "a desolação do homem," whether physically or mentally or both. Careful analysis of these stories will show, however, that beyond threatening the existence of individual men, these *femmes fatales* signal the demise of a whole system of patriarchal thinking.

## Woman as Siren

One of the clearest representations of the *femme fatale* in Machado's fiction is the trope of *woman as siren*. The fantastic stories that fit into this trope are "O anjo Rafael," "A cartomante," "O anjo das donzelas," "Bagatela," "A vida eterna," "Sem olhos," and "O Capitão Mendonça." In these stories, as with sirens in classical literature, the men who fall prey to their captivating power encounter suffering and often death. While classical sirens use their song to seduce, Machado's sirens use something else: their eyes. The power of the female gaze is evident in others of Machado's works, such as *Dom Casmurro*, in which Capitu's eyes are described as having

não sei que fluido misterioso e enérgico, uma força que arrastava para dentro, como a vaga que se retira da praia, nos dias de ressaca. Para não ser arrastado, agarrei-me às outras partes vizinhas, às orelhas, aos braços, aos cabelos espalhados pelos ombros; mas tão depressa buscava as pupilas, a onda que saía delas vinha crescendo, cava e escura, ameaçando envolver-me, puxar-me e tragar-me.

Bentinho feels powerless against Capitu's eyes, and, as the story continues, he is captivated—even obsessed—by them. Lisboa asserts that at this point of the novel Capitu is "in full command of her siren song" (222). Ferreira-Pinto writes that, to Bentinho, Capitu is "another version of the seductive Eve . . . a sketch of the powerful Medusa with her dangerous, hypnotizing eyes" (21). And like these siren figures, Capitu's dangerous eyes lead Bento to his downfall. Similarly, women's eyes in the fantastic stories analyzed below exercise "um papel decisivo e mesmo tirânico de sedução amorosa" (Gomes 99). The consequences of their encounters with men almost always include suffering or death. Far from being driven by bloodlust or sadism, these

women are motivated (whether consciously or not) by a survival instinct. In a patriarchal society that strips women of every other power and opportunity, seducing men is the only way they can challenge the myth of male superiority and improve their situation.

In “O anjo Rafael,” Celestina seduces Antero and thereby challenges the notion of female inferiority. When Antero meets Celestina, “uma verdadeira beleza” whose “olhos serenos e doces pareciam feitos para a contemplação,” he cannot stop looking at her. Antero is captivated by the beauty—and most especially the eyes—of the woman before him. Tomás is not surprised to hear that Antero wants to marry his daughter because he knows that one look would be enough to seal his fate: “bastava vê-la para ficá-la amando.” Like Amaral in “O Capitão Mendonça,” Antero questions his future father-in-law’s sanity, but he does not consider the possibility of leaving because “a ideia da moça começava a ser um vínculo.” Antero even forgets to be grateful to Tomás for the promised fortune because he is so caught up in the siren’s power and because his eyes are “esquecidamente embebedos” as he looks into Celestina’s. As in the other stories in this section, the beautiful woman has only to look at the man to make him drunk on love for her. This story is an exception in that Celestina does not lead Antero to his death, but she does function as a siren to the extent that she captivates him.<sup>26</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, Celestina is painfully weak and naïve, but despite this (or perhaps because of it), Regina Chicoski’s statement holds true for Antero’s relationship with her: “o feminino, embora visto por muitos como o sexo frágil, na verdade representa uma grande força perante o masculino devido ao poder que exerce e lhe é próprio: o poder da sedução” (2). Though in many ways a naïve and

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<sup>26</sup> “Um sonho e outro sonho” is another example of seduction that does not end in tragedy. Despite his knowledge that Genoveva is determined not to remarry, Oliveira is enchanted by her “vestidos pretos, tez muito clara e olhos muito grandes.” After patiently waiting for several months, Oliveira proposes to Genoveva and they marry.

weak character, Celestina exerts a powerful influence over Antero that complicates her classification as manipulable possession and undermines the notion of male superiority.

In “A cartomante,” Rita functions as the seductress who leads Camilo to his downfall, her gaze serving as a challenge to the male-dominated world in which she lives. When Camilo first meets Rita, the wife of his childhood friend Vilela, he notes her beauty and her “olhos cálidos.” As he and Rita spend more time together, Camilo notices that Rita’s “olhos teimosos . . . procuravam muita vez os dele,” even before consulting her husband’s eyes. Like many men encountering sirens, “Camilo quis sinceramente fugir” but is unable to break free of her grasp: “Rita, como uma serpente, foi-se acercando dele, envolveu-o todo, fez-lhe estalar os ossos num espasmo, e pingou-lhe o veneno na boca. Ele ficou atordoado e subjugado.” Like Adam in the Garden of Eden, Camilo struggles in vain against the fatal influence of the Eve figure, who has been corrupted by the serpent’s deception. Entangled in her monstrous grip, Camilo continues his adulterous relationship with her until his death at Vilela’s hands. In this story, Rita functions quite literally as the *femme fatale* who leads the man to death, and in this case she dies along with her victim. Rita’s fatal seduction of Camilo can be better understood when considering Lisboa’s comment: “If Machado’s portrayal of the monster woman is not uniformly flattering, therefore, nevertheless it always contains an indictment of its probable source, pinpointed as contextual rather than innate” (259). Rita’s behavior, although adulterous, is motivated in part by the restrictions society places on her. Unable to exert influence in healthy ways because of her oppressive environment, she resorts to seduction to retain what little independence she can. Despite her apparent naïveté, her seductive gaze entraps Camilo and turns the myth of male dominance on its head.



Cecília also functions as a type of siren in “O anjo das donzelas,” subverting societal expectations and leading men to suffer through her determination to never marry. Although this story does not draw particular attention to Cecília’s eyes, it does describe her exceptional beauty. Suitor after suitor attempts to woo her, but each one “afinal desist[e] da empresa com a convicção de que nada podia fazer.” The most notable of these would-be lovers is the young poet who, unable to live with the suffering he feels at his rejection, commits suicide. Before dying, he writes a letter to Cecília in which he affirms, “Morro por ti.” The other suitors “recorreram aos meios extremos ou deixaram-se dominar pela dor.” Thus, the siren seduces men (in this case unintentionally) and brings suffering—even death—to those who attempt to woo her. All the while, Cecília rejects them with an “impassibilidade cruel,” apparently indifferent to their pain. And while the other siren figures in Machado’s fantastic stories bring suffering or death to one man, it would take “dois volumes” to describe all the would-be suitors who attempted (unsuccessfully) to woo her. Cecília brings pain to countless men and death to at least one. In *Dom Casmurro*, Capitu’s guilt in Bento’s suffering is left ambiguous in the novel, whereas in “O anjo das donzelas” there is no questions that Cecília is directly responsible for these men’s suffering. Curiously, it is her nonconformist stance toward societal expectations that causes her to be such a strong siren figure in this story. Whereas most women in these stories are desirable for their submissive nature, it is Cecília’s determined repudiation of patriarchal expectations that attracts so many suitors to her. Her refusal to marry is fueled by a fear of suffering in an unhealthy marriage. Stein describes the bleak prospect of marriage in nineteenth-century Brazil: “Para a mulher . . . além da aceitação social daí decorrente, o casamento pouco lhe podia trazer” (32). In a society full of arranged marriages and domineering men, matrimony offered no guarantee of happiness. These ideas are what led Cecília to make a vow that she would never

marry. Although her vow was nothing more than a dream, Cecília—the irrational woman—captures the imagination of dozens of rational suitors, who surrender their agency as they are seduced by the embodiment of female inferiority. This is a subtle subversion of the illusion of male dominance in that Cecília, whose only respectable option for social ascension is marriage, exercises enormous power over the men in her life precisely because she refuses to marry.

In “Bagatela,” Gabriela functions as a siren only because of Max’s stubbornness and the absurd test to which he secretly subjects Gabriela and Henrique. In this story, Henrique is troubled because he loves Gabriela (nicknamed “Bagatela”) but feels that to act on his love would be to betray the trust of Max, whose dying wish was that he care for Gabriela without falling in love with her. Unable to live with the pain of loving her without being able to marry her, Henrique decides to commit suicide. At the last moment Gabriela arrives and prevents his death, declaring her love for him. In the end they marry, and Max, who was actually still alive but was testing their loyalty by faking his death, is overcome by grief upon seeing that his two best friends betrayed him. In despair he drinks a vial of poison, ending his life. Although Max was disappointed by Henrique, he was certainly more devastated by Gabriela’s actions—she who told Henrique they should pursue their love and that she took full responsibility for their disloyalty to Max’s memory. The tragic end of the siren’s power is averted for Henrique, but it is not for Max. Thus, “a desolação do homem” is once more caused by a beautiful woman. Embedded in this story, however, lies a criticism of male unreasonableness. Had Max not invented the absurd test of their devotion to him, he could have married Gabriela and been happy. It is his inability to trust Gabriela—his belief in female fickleness—that pushes her into the role of siren and robs him of his chance for happiness. In this story it is Max, not Gabriela, who appears to be inferior.

Eusébia, from “A vida eterna,” is yet another ironic siren figure in Machado’s fantastic literature. Despite being portrayed as a manipulable possession by Camilo, she ultimately becomes his manipulator and leads him to his death. When Camilo first sees Eusébia he remarks, “Tinha eu até então visto muitas mulheres de fascinar; nenhuma chegava aos pés daquela.” Her gentle manner and friendliness conquer him immediately, and from their first meeting his eyes are “embebidos nos dela.” It is because of Eusébia’s enchanting power that Camilo, a seventy-year-old man who moments earlier had tried to get out of his arranged marriage, proceeds eagerly to their wedding. Ironically, although Camilo sees her as a potential possession, it is she who manipulates him and seals his fate as the meal for Tobias’s cannibalistic feast. Camilo says as much when he declares that her words were a “verdadeiro laço” and that, had it not been for them, he would not have agreed to marry her. And though her words do seduce him, he is captivated by her physical beauty and by her eyes even before he hears her voice. It is worth remembering that Eusébia’s father, Tobias, threatens to shoot Camilo if he does not marry his daughter, giving him ample motivation to go through with the wedding. But, significantly, when Camilo sees Eusébia, he gives up all his previous thoughts of fleeing Tobias’s grasp and willingly marries her, thus relinquishing any possibility (or desire) for escape. Eusébia is a manipulable possession in the hands of her father, but she is also the *femme fatale* who seals Camilo’s disastrous fate. In discussing women in some of Machado’s short stories, Fitz writes that “for want of other, better opportunities, [women] have no other choice but to learn to be what their conservative and restrictive society wants them to be. Were other options available to them, they might well not make the decisions they do” (7). Accordingly, Eusébia is unable to exercise true independence because of her father’s manipulation, so she learns to act as he wants her to. With this in mind, it becomes clear that Eusébia’s status as siren is not self-proclaimed.

Rather, it is imposed on her by her father. She does not want to participate in his murderous scheme, but she is forced to go along with it. Rather than condemning her actions, this story exposes the patriarchal demands that compel her to assume this deadly persona.

The most prominent siren figure in “Sem olhos” is Lucinda, who leads Damasceno to his death by a single glance.<sup>27</sup> She first appears in the story when Damasceno has a vision of her and pleads with her to come back “daqui a um ano! . . . a dois . . . a três. Vai-te, Lucinda! Deixa-me!” Damasceno knows that her coming is a sign of his impending death and does not want to leave mortality yet. Like a siren’s call, though, Lucinda’s influence is overwhelming and shortly thereafter Damasceno dies, having succumbed to her power yet again—first in falling in love with her, and then in dying. He recognizes very well the power Lucinda has over him when he tells Cruz to never allow himself to “olhar ou ser olhado pela mulher de seu próximo.” This comment signals his belief that being seduced by a woman is beyond his control. Once she looks at him, he is incapable of escaping her clutches. After seeing her portrait, Cruz describes Lucinda as having “os mais expressivos olhos que jamais contemplei na minha vida.” Damasceno then states, “Sabe o que nos matou? Um olhar.” Damasceno recognizes the power of Lucinda’s eyes and that, had they not locked eyes, he would not be close to death. It is their shared look that results in Lucinda’s eyes being burned out. Lucinda’s tremendous power over Damasceno is surprising when compared to her apparent subservience and impotence in most of their interactions. Mary Ann Doane’s comment about the *femme fatale* applies to Lucinda: “In a sense, she has power *despite herself*” (2). Notwithstanding her weakness, her manipulability and fragile

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<sup>27</sup> Maria do Céu, present at the dinner when Cruz tells the story of Damasceno and Lucinda, could also be seen as a siren figure in this story. She is “uma mulher bela” with “olhos miúdos e redondos.” Her eyes captivated her husband’s attention a few years earlier and seem to have enchanted Antunes as well, leading him to contemplate an adulterous relationship with her. Lucinda is the main siren in this story, however, so my analysis focuses on her.

nature, Lucinda exercises enormous control over Damasceno and over Cruz. The image of her eyeless face haunts Damasceno for the rest of his life, driving him mad and eventually killing him. As in “A Cartomante,” in this story both the man and the woman suffer and ultimately die as a result of the siren’s gaze. And, as in “A vida eterna,” the apparently manipulable woman becomes the manipulator who leads her victim to his death.

Another instance of the manipulated becoming the manipulator is “O Capitão Mendonça,” in which Augusta’s eyes conquer Amaral’s heart and lead him into danger. When Amaral first sees Augusta’s “dois belíssimos olhos verdes,” he begins to study her more intently, interpreting every move she makes as a flirtatious gesture inviting him to admire her. From then on, his infatuation with her grows stronger and stronger. Like the siren’s song, Augusta’s eyes draw him in and cloud his mind, preventing him from thinking about anything else. Amaral later remarks that Augusta was “o único laço que havia entre mim e o mundo,” revealing that she is what motivates him to stay in Mendonça’s sinister house. After seeing Augusta’s grotesque eyeless head, Amaral is repulsed for a time but soon begins to feel “uma sensação nova, que não sei se era amor, se admiração, se fatal simpatia. Quando fitava os olhos dela dificilmente podia afastar os meus.” Although Amaral is disgusted by Augusta when she is missing her eyes, when Mendonça restores them Amaral is totally enchanted by her. When he finally leaves the captain’s house, Amaral cannot clear his brain of the “imagem da moça [que] flutuava entre o nevoeiro da [sua] imaginação.” Whether he is horrified by this vision or fascinated by it is not as important as the fact that he cannot break free of Augusta’s power. He is figuratively intoxicated “pela fascinação do olhar da moça.” When Mendonça describes how he will insert genius into Amaral’s brain, Amaral pays little attention to him because his eyes are “embebidos nos de Augusta.” Had he been less enchanted by Augusta’s power he could have avoided his fate, but

because Augusta clouds his mind he does not think clearly until it is too late. When Amaral finally realizes his plight and contemplates an escape, he concedes, “Uma força me prendia, e dificilmente poderia eu arrancar-me dali; era Augusta. Aquela moça exercia sobre mim uma pressão a um tempo doce e dolorosa; sentia-me escravo dela, a minha vida como que se fundia na sua; era uma fascinação vertiginosa.” It is her enslaving power that leads Amaral to his downfall. Had he not been enchanted by Augusta’s beauty—especially by her captivating green eyes—he would not have returned to Mendonça’s house and would not have ended up paralyzed, with the scientist drilling a hole into his head. As was mentioned in the *woman as manipulable possession* section, Augusta’s identity as automaton creates an image of complete deference to male authority. She is clearly manipulated by Mendonça, but her powerful gaze transforms her into manipulator when interacting with Amaral. Throughout this story both Amaral and Mendonça affirm that Augusta is perfect, exhibiting all the characteristics a woman should have. Curiously, Augusta’s power of seduction is the most pronounced of her traits, revealing the extent to which these men (especially her creator) view women as capable—or incapable—of assuming other roles. If Augusta, the perfect woman according to male standards, is first and foremost a seductress, what options are left for mortal women other than using their beauty to seduce and influence the men around them? This story powerfully highlights the chauvinist view that women’s value is determined primarily by their sexual appeal. In a society permeated by these notions, it is little wonder that so many of Machado’s women become sirens. Rather than condoning this behavior, “O Capitão Mendonça” and the other stories in this section illustrate how much their patriarchal society has reinforced it.

In each of the stories analyzed in this section, the woman has a captivating power over the man. And in almost every case, that power is directly linked to the woman’s eyes. Sometimes

these women captivate men intentionally, sometimes unintentionally, but in almost all cases, men suffer or die as a result of meeting the siren's seductive gaze. As was the case with the *woman as manipulable possession* trope, the frequent repetition of the *woman as siren* trope in these stories is evidence of the limited options women had in society, suggesting that women are often forced into these roles by societal demands and restrictions. Although the role of siren is not a silent one, these stories call attention to its prevalence and suggest that if women were given more access to educational and professional opportunities, they would not have to resort to their powers of seduction to assert their independence. In addition to calling attention to women's limited options in society, this trope is in itself a challenge of patriarchy. Carla Rodrigues writes that the inclusion of the female gaze in Machado's fiction constitutes an "ousadia machadiana":

Às mulheres de seu tempo não era dado o direito de olhar, privilégio masculino da sedução. Baixar os olhos diante de um homem era a regra social em vigor. Sustentando o olhar para um homem de forma desafiadora, Capitu seria uma mulher de vanguarda; ela não apenas olha Bentinho com amor, mas, sobretudo, usa o olhar como expressão para seduzir e confundir. (62)

In the same way that Capitu's gaze is a challenge to male dominance, the siren figures in these stories use their gaze to seduce and confuse. Seduction—which in these stories is represented most commonly through the symbol of the female gaze—is “uma arma feminina, afinal é o que dá poder à mulher. Assim, o feminino deixa de ser considerado o lado frágil e dominado passando a ser visto como o ser dominante” (Chicoski 2). It is the seductive gaze—whether intentional or unintentional—that allows Machadian women to break free from the *woman as manipulable possession* trope, transforming them from *femmes fragiles* into *femmes fatales*.

While these sirens still function in a stereotypical role, they move toward independence by deconstructing the notion that women are powerless beings meant to be dominated by men. In one of the most famous feminist texts ever written, Hélène Cixous discusses the Medusa, a common iteration of the *femme fatale* in literature: “You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she’s not deadly. She’s beautiful and she’s laughing” (885). Cixous asserts that the Medusa is not dangerous but beautiful. Similarly, in Machado’s fantastic fiction the siren figures are beautiful. Although they appear to threaten the entire male sex, in reality they subvert only those aspects of the patriarchal system that oppress women. These stories can be interpreted as an invitation to “look at the Medusa straight on” in order to see her for what she really is: a woman who is not dangerous, but rather beautiful and different, and who yearns for better opportunities in her society. Seeing women in this way would allow Brazilian society to improve in its attitude toward and treatment of women, paving the way for national progress.

#### Woman as Fantastic Other

In addition to appearing as sirens, women in Machado’s fantastic fiction also operate as *femmes fatales* by functioning as the fantastic element that challenges male rationality. This is the case in “Sem olhos,” “Um esqueleto,” “Mariana,” and “O Capitão Mendonça.” While discussing how females relate to the fantastic, Duncan writes the following: “Because male narrators are attempting to carve out a gendered subject position from which they can tell the story, the female characters are pushed into the role of Other, representing not only difference but also danger” (244). She also explains that a woman is designated as “Other” when a man is unable to comprehend or accurately describe her (135). It is this sense of the sometimes nebulous term *other* that I will use in this section: that which is different, incomprehensible, and often dangerous. When confronted with the apparently supernatural qualities of women, the male



narrators feel threatened and respond by thrusting them into the realm of the incomprehensible other, the dangerous *femme fatale* who “never really is what she seems to be” (Doane 1). Viewed in this way, women seem to be diametrically opposed to men, embodying that which cannot be explained and therefore representing danger. In other words, when a woman is identified as other, she acts as a *femme fatale* who exceeds the bounds of male reason and rationality and threatens to undermine them. In *Dom Casmurro*, Bento views Capitu as a *femme fatale* who leads him to his downfall by her adulterous behavior. While her alleged adultery remains questionable, Capitu’s representation as dangerous permeates the novel and much scholarly criticism, stemming initially from José Dias’s negative evaluation and later from Bento’s jealous reflections about her. As Lisboa writes, Capitu appears as “independent, unfettered and fearless, different, ‘other’” (222). Along similar lines, John Gledson posits that “Capitu cannot be ‘explained’, if by that we mean reduced to one or other of the false alternatives which a simplistic social or emotional version of human psychology might propose” (*Deceptive Realism* 72). Because she defies categorization, Capitu is a dangerous and incomprehensible other. In the stories analyzed below, men’s perception of women is similar to Bento’s image of Capitu. To them, women represent a dismantling of reason and of what is possible. Returning to the definition provided in the beginning, we remember that the fantastic is “tudo que não é” and “tudo que não pode acontecer” (Tavares 8). In the stories below, these *femmes fatales* are “others” who represent just that—the incredible and impossible. They take the form of both artificial women (skeletons, ghosts, automata, etc.) and natural (human) women. While the artificial women represent the fantastic, they simultaneously point to the “otherness” of natural women in the way they defy male comprehension. Together, they constitute fantastic others who

challenge male conceptions of reality and expose how men reject women who do not satisfy their patriarchal expectations.

In “Sem olhos,” Lucinda’s ghost transgresses the bounds of reality and calls attention to how men punish insubordinate, “other” women. When Damasceno first sees Lucinda’s ghost, it is not clear whether or not he is simply hallucinating, especially since his other interactions with Cruz suggest he is mad. But when Cruz (who, as a judge, is the embodiment of rationality) sees her, that which “não pode acontecer” thrusts itself upon him and the reader: “De pé, junto à parede, vi uma mulher lívida, a mesma do retrato, com os cabelos soltos, e os olhos. . . Os olhos, esses eram duas cavidades vazias e ensanguentadas.” Cruz, a rational man who until then did not believe in ghosts, sees the awful specter of Damasceno’s love. He remarks that, faced with this apparition, “senti esvaírem-se-me as forças e quase a razão.” Lucinda’s ghost, a lingering shadow of the real Lucinda, constitutes a direct challenge to the logical explanations Cruz seeks for everything. The fantastic element of the story becomes even more powerful when he reveals that Damasceno’s story was another of his deranged illusions, “uma simples invenção de alienado.” Although Cruz cannot explain how or why he saw Lucinda’s eyeless face, he staunchly affirms that he did see her. This hesitation in the face of the supernatural persists in the minds of Cruz, his audience, and the readers even after the story ends. Cruz, who appears to be a reliable narrator, encounters what cannot be and is haunted by it for the rest of his life. And in this story, what cannot be is woman. Lucinda thus constitutes a *femme fatale* who threatens the solidity of male certainty. The most horrifying aspect of Lucinda’s ghost is her bloody eye sockets, a gory reminder of how her husband punishes her for the illicit glance that reveals he does not control her as completely as he thinks. His revenge is an immature response to the discovery that Lucinda is “other”—Lucinda’s imperfect submission to his authority constitutes a

threat to his power. Unable to live with this frightening prospect, he mutilates her in a final assertion of superiority. Thus, Lucinda's unnatural specter acts as the fantastic element of the story while her natural, human body reflects the brutal environment in which Brazilian women of the time found themselves.

As in "Sem olhos," woman's ghastly remains introduce the fantastic in "Um esqueleto" and hint at why Belém abandons Marcelina, the natural woman of the story. Immediately after Alberto mentions the word "esqueleto," the narrator refers to Hoffmann in a clear appeal to the fantastic mode. After seeing the skeleton for the first time, Alberto begins to doubt Belém's sanity. Belém's frequent interactions with and displays of affection toward the skeleton heighten the sense of the supernatural in the story. To Alberto, the skeleton is fantastic because it represents what cannot be in conservative Brazilian society—no sane man would choose a skeleton's companionship over a human's, and no rational man would embrace a skeleton in the middle of the night and talk to it. Furthermore, no sensible man would abandon his wife and home in favor of a life in the forest with a skeleton. Clearly, the skeleton (and Belém's attitude toward it) is the fantastic, troubling element of the story that challenges reality. In addition to representing the fantastic, the skeleton is a foil for Marcelina, the female "other" in the story who is both inaccessible and incomprehensible to Belém. As mentioned in the previous section, Belém's preference for the skeleton results from his frustration at not being able to fully control Marcelina. He is more comfortable interacting with a woman's bones than with a woman's mind. Unable to tolerate the threat Marcelina's otherness represents, he chooses to devote himself entirely to a counterfeit that is totally comprehensible because it is inanimate. This provides him with the illusion of control, but it ostracizes the real, live woman in the story, hinting at the position of women in patriarchal perception: they are incomprehensible and lead men to

suffering, and it is therefore preferable to construct pseudo-women who do not challenge male authority rather than to engage with the living, breathing women around them.

In “Mariana,” the artificial woman once again represents the fantastic while the natural woman functions as the enigmatic “other” who is ultimately rejected for being too incomprehensible. In this story, Evaristo visits his the home of his former lover, Mariana, now married to another man who is currently on his deathbed. As he waits in the entry of the house while the servant informs Mariana of his arrival, Evaristo gazes at a painting of Mariana and begins conversing with it. As he talks, Mariana climbs out of the frame, grasps his hands, and expresses her undying love for him. After a long conversation full of passionate words to each other, Evaristo awakens from what he discovers was nothing more than a waking dream, a recollection of an actual encounter from eighteen years earlier. In this first part of the story, Mariana represents the fantastic in that she embodies what cannot be—a painting coming to life and conversing with a man. In contrast to the dream Mariana, however, the real Mariana indulges in no romantic fantasies with Evaristo: “Nem os olhos nem a mão de Mariana revelaram em relação a ele uma impressão qualquer.” Unlike the dream Mariana, the real Mariana functions as an incomprehensible other to Evaristo. He cannot understand her total indifference toward his feelings, calling her coldness a “mistério” based on their passionate relationship from years earlier. He cannot access her thoughts and cannot understand her behavior. In a move similar to Belém’s in “Um esqueleto,” Evaristo chooses to hold on to the inanimate woman rather than the live one: “Lembrando-se do retrato da sala, Evaristo concluiu que a arte era superior à natureza.” The real Mariana defies comprehension, so he simply latches on to the two-dimensional representation of Mariana incapable of inflicting pain on him. Once again, real women are dismissed in favor of fragmentary male constructions of women.

In “O Capitão Mendonça,” Augusta represents the fantastic other in her incredible origins and in her absolute perfection, while at the same time exposing the “otherness” of natural women. Until Augusta enters the story, Amaral’s interactions with Mendonça seem totally possible, even if perhaps a little mysterious. But when Mendonça holds “os dois belos olhos da moça” in his hand after removing them from her head, Amaral encounters what cannot be—he is confronted with the fantastic. This effect is compounded when Amaral notices that Augusta’s eyes, even when removed from her body, are still fixed on him: “Separados do rosto, não os abandonara a vida; a retina tinha a mesma luz e os mesmos reflexos.” Augusta’s supernatural green eyes retain their capacity to process what is happening, embodying “tudo que não pode acontecer” and causing Amaral to question what is real:

A menina era realmente um produto químico do velho? Ambos mo haviam afirmado, e até certo ponto tive a prova disso. Podia supô-los doidos, mas o episódio dos olhos desvanecia essa ideia. Estaria eu ainda no mundo dos vivos, ou começara já a entrar na região dos sonhos e do desconhecido? Só a fortaleza do meu espírito resistiu a tamanhas provas; outro, que fosse mais fraco, teria enlouquecido. E seria melhor. O que tornava a minha situação mais dolorosa e impossível de suportar era justamente a perfeita solidez da minha razão. Do conflito da minha razão com os meus sentidos resultava a tortura em que me eu achava; os meus olhos viam, a minha razão negava. Como conciliar aquela evidência com aquela incredulidade?

In this passage Amaral experiences the hesitation Todorov considers so essential to the fantastic. He cannot deny what his eyes have seen, and yet he cannot initially accept what reason tells him is impossible. To him, everything about Augusta represents what cannot be. It is for this reason

that he struggles so much to decide whether her alleged “origem misteriosa e diabólica” is real. In addition to her incredible existence as a “produto químico,” Augusta represents the fantastic—the impossible—because she surpasses natural women in her qualities. Amaral describes her thus: “Augusta era tão bela como as outras mulheres—talvez mais bela—, pela mesma razão que a folha da árvore pintada é mais bela que a folha natural. Era um produto de arte; o saber do autor despojou o tipo humano de suas incorreções para criar um tipo ideal, um exemplar único.” It is precisely her perfection that places Augusta in the realm of the fantastic. That she sees herself as different from other women becomes apparent when she tells Amaral that “todas as outras mulheres são filhas bastardas, eu só posso gabar-me de ser filha legítima, porque sou filha da ciência e da vontade do homem.” In her perfection, however, Augusta reveals the “otherness” of natural women, who cannot be melted down and reshaped at will by men. These women defy categorization and represent unknowability in male eyes. Augusta has been purified of the “inorreções” of natural women, which are what Amaral calls the different and dangerous aspects of female nature. Augusta’s self-identification as daughter of the “vontade do homem” reveals that she is nothing more than the product of patriarchal projections of how women should be. Amaral’s attitude toward Augusta is strikingly similar to Evaristo’s perception of Mariana: in his eyes, “a arte era superior à natureza.” In other words, male constructions of artificial women are preferable to human women. The two men think this way because natural women are unfathomable and threaten their illusion of superiority. It is precisely Augusta’s perfection that highlights the unknowability of real, fallible women in men’s eyes. Hentz writes that it is curious Machado should create such a female character, who is “fora dos modelos femininos do período,” in a journal meant for women readers. She posits that Augusta’s artificial nature is what authorizes her to “transgredir os papéis sociais atribuídos às mulheres em seu período” (9).

In both her behavior and her appearance, Augusta subverts reality by challenging the natural limits of what women can be. In this patriarchal society, only an artificial woman is permitted to break free of male expectations. This calls attention once more to the oppressive conditions in which nineteenth-century Brazilian women lived. As with the other characters analyzed in this study, Augusta does not explicitly criticize gender relations in Brazil. Rather, by personifying chauvinist conceptions of the ideal woman, Augusta exposes the patriarchal pipe dream of male control and female subservience as the impossible and cancerous myth it is.

Some of the women in these stories represent the fantastic, some represent the female “other,” and some represent both. Whatever their role, all of these women become *femmes fatales* by signifying the death of male authority. The artificial women (Lucinda’s ghost, the skeleton, the painting of Mariana, and Augusta) overthrow male conceptions of reality by introducing the fantastic into the stories. The natural women (Lucinda, Marcelina, and Mariana) act as “others” who challenge patriarchal views of gender roles and draw attention to the damaging ways in which males respond to these perceived threats. Like Capitu, each of these women remains “um enigma, isto pela impossibilidade de delineá-la e concretizá-la. Por mais que se procure apreendê-la, ela sempre escapa” (Stein 105). Such impossibility of comprehending the other is part of what constitutes the fantastic in the male narrators’ perspective. As stated before, the fantastic represents what cannot be—what characters cannot comprehend within their framework of reality. In these stories, perhaps the most striking concept that escapes their comprehension is true femininity, free from patriarchal impositions. As Anélia Pietrani writes, Machado’s women are “personagens consideradas ‘assustadoras’ aos olhos masculinos. Transgridem os sistemas delimitadores da cultura patriarcal . . . sendo, portanto, consideradas símbolos da desordem” (53). In other words, they break through the limits of male

reality by undermining the patriarchal systems of thought these men inherit from their society. Despite their role as *femmes fatales*, however, they do not exemplify the ideal woman. Doane cautions us not to view the *femme fatale* as “some kind of heroine of modernity,” explaining that she is nothing more than “a symptom of male fears about femininity” (3). The *femme fatale* challenges male authority to some extent, but she does not represent the full potential of women. In these stories, these figures are not enviable—they are oppressed and shunned by the men around them. Eigler and Kord explain that, despite her power, the *femme fatale* “remains a cipher and a chimera, the underside of socially determined constructions of gender” (164). Rather than being celebrated as a heroic figure, the *femme fatale*—whether she appears as a siren or as a fantastic other—is feared, even hated by those she threatens. She does not choose this role, but rather assumes it “out of circumstantially enforced necessity” (Lisboa 259). Becoming a *femme fatale* is arguably the most effective way for a woman to voice her opinions and exert her influence in a male-dominated society, but it is not a permanent solution. It often results in the same inequality that existed before, only this time it is women oppressing men. By presenting women as sirens and as fantastic others, Machado does not advocate that Brazilian women should aspire to these roles; instead, he merely taps into these stereotypes to call attention to the diseased nature of patriarchal thought and the need for monumental and systemic change.



## CONCLUSION

### Social Criticism in Machado

Near the beginning of this study, I quoted Todorov's assertion that fantastic literature is "nothing more than the uneasy conscience of the positivist nineteenth century" (169). If that is true for Machado's fantastic as well, how do his stories—which at first glance seem blatantly misogynist—perform this function in the context of gender inequality? If, as Jackson argues, the fantastic is truly focused on the "dissolution of an order experienced as oppressive and insufficient" (180), can we consider these Machadian stories to be fantastic in their function as well as in their form? On the surface, Machado does not seem to openly condemn the chauvinist perception of women in the fantastic stories analyzed. In fact, his female characters seem to conform perfectly to Fitz's description of how Machado's women are often interpreted: "less than admirable," "meretricious and fickle," and "presented to the reader in less than sympathetic, even misogynistic, ways" (6). The four tropes analyzed in this study (*woman as foil for rational man*, *woman as manipulable possession*, *woman as siren*, and *woman as fantastic other*) can be seen as reinforcing these condescending views of women. His fantastic stories seem to reinforce the patriarchal traditions and perceptions of his time, with no clear calls for social change. Despite Machado's apparent sexism, Fitz asserts that the Brazilian master was "fully aware" of the danger of "patriarchal ways of thinking" (8), and that he, "the ultimate craftsman," was not careless in creating his female characters (194). Gledson likewise cautions us against simplistic readings of Machado: "Não deveríamos pensar, só pela maneira como retrata as mulheres, que Machado julgasse que fossem assim por sua própria natureza" ("Machete e violoncelo" 60). According to these critics, although Machado's works appear to support patriarchy, they contain veiled (but strong) critiques of gender inequality. In this study I have attempted to demonstrate

that Machado denounces chauvinist ideals just as strongly in his fantastic stories as he does in his realist works. I have analyzed some of the ways in which he discreetly condemns chauvinist ideals but have not yet addressed why he disguises his critiques in the first place. Machado's indirect approach to social criticism is influenced in large measure by the expectations of his readership.

#### Machado's Readers

All of the stories used in this study were published in the *Jornal das Famílias*, with the exception of “A cartomante” (published in the *Gazeta de Notícias*) and “Um sonho e outro sonho” (published in *A Estação*). According to Álvaro Simões Júnior, the *Jornal das Famílias* was directed to a public that was mostly female, “oferecendo-lhe moda, receitas, conselhos para a vida doméstica e literatura amena, sentimentalista e edificante” (15). This explains in part why Machado nearly always resolved the fantastic elements of his story by dreams or otherwise—he did not want to “maltratar os róseos nervos ou desalinhar as tranças de suas fiéis leitoras” (Fernandes). If he included too many fantastic elements in his stories, or if he did not resolve most of them, he risked offending his primary audience. In addition to being considerate of women's tastes, however, a more practical explanation exists: the subscription to the journal was paid for mostly by these Brazilian women's husbands. For this reason, Jaison Crestani remarks that Machado found himself on the “*fio da navalha*” in the sense that he had the “obrigação de não escandalizar o pai ou marido que pagava pela assinatura do jornal e, ao mesmo tempo, seduzir a mulher que o lia” (68). Regardless of his personal views, Machado needed to please his readers (and their husbands), hence the recourse to indirect rather than blatant criticism of the

crippling patriarchal attitudes so prevalent in his day.<sup>28</sup> Machado may have recognized that one of the most effective ways to achieve social change is not to offer solutions but rather to simply magnify perspectives and systems of thought. This allows readers to draw their own conclusions about the validity of these structures.

#### Social Criticism in Machado's Fantastic vs. Realist Works

In addition to including social criticism in his fantastic fiction, Machado subtly inserts it into his novels as well. For example, Ferreira-Pinto writes that *Dom Casmurro* portrays the condition of Brazilian women but simultaneously “problematizes that condition through the use of ambiguity and an unreliable narrator, thus inviting the reader to look at it in a critical way” (26). Just as he does in his fantastic fiction, Machado puts patriarchal society on display for readers to analyze it for themselves. Speaking of social criticism in Machado's novels, Fitz states the following:

Machado wants his New Reader to do to the text she or he is reading, interpreting, and analyzing exactly what he (Machado) wants this same reader/citizen to do to her or his society: Think seriously about all this, his texts seem to say to us; consider what is truly going on (slavery, the effects of slavery, and the suppression of women, for example), and decide whether things should continue as they are or be changed and whether a new and more progressive society should be constructed, one which would involve a radical change in the status of Brazilian women. (21-22)

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<sup>28</sup> It is also possible that, in addition to protecting his livelihood, Machado veiled his criticism to ensure that his stories would circulate more, thereby reaching more people and subtly planting the idea that patriarchy was a broken system that needed replacing.

As readers think critically about what they are reading (whether in Machado's realist fiction or in his fantastic fiction), they identify unhealthy attitudes and behaviors and are motivated to correct them. This impetus for social change, if adopted correctly, does not lead readers to "replace one hierarchical structure with another but merely to extend our perceptions as a way of opening a space for those who have been marginalized" (Duncan 44). Thus, Machado's dismantling of patriarchy does not include a call for a woman-dominated society. It simply seeks to broaden readers' perception of gender roles and recognize the problematic attitudes that need to be overcome.

Although Machado denounces patriarchy in his realist works, using the fantastic allows him to include exaggerated elements that expose patriarchy in ways not possible in his realist fiction. He seems to understand that "é através do fantástico que a verdade dos monstros reais que a sociedade e a cultura secretam podem vir à tona" (Batalha 19). Indeed, many of Machado's most monstrous figures (who also embody the strongest critiques of patriarchal society) are supernatural, such as the automaton Augusta and Lucinda's ghost. If he had adhered strictly to realist conventions, these women would not appear in his works because they cannot be found in reality. As Machado matured as a writer, he came to view realism as increasingly "superficial," "restrictive," and "inadequate" for his goals as a social thinker (Fitz 6). Turning to the fantastic allowed him to surpass certain boundaries, exploring alternate ways of thinking and of addressing gender issues. The four tropes analyzed in this study also manifest themselves in Machado's realist fiction, but in his fantastic fiction they are exaggerated and quickly identifiable. For example, in "O Capitão Mendonça" and in "A vida eterna," the male characters encounter ruin within just a few pages of meeting the siren's gaze. In contrast, Bento encounters Capitu's gaze early on in *Dom Casmurro*, but hundreds of pages separate their first meeting and

Bento's downfall. In his novels, Machado teases and slowly draws out his critiques of patriarchy; in his fantastic short stories, he quickly relays his critiques, thus exploring the extremes of patriarchal thinking, such as an automaton molded to satisfy male desires or a skeleton completely manipulated by its owner. In these short stories, Machado must get right to the point in presenting and simultaneously dismantling patriarchal conceptions of women. His liberty to include what is beyond reality allows him to explore what might happen to Brazilian society if chauvinist ideas are propagated and taken to the extreme. These themes appear in his realist fiction as well, but addressing them through the lens of the fantastic allows him to explore their flaws in starker relief.<sup>29</sup> Restrained by the limits of reality when writing in the realist mode, Machado turns to the fantastic to magnify the problems of patriarchal thinking and broaden our perspective on gender relations in Brazil.

Eminent feminist critic Judith Butler writes that gender is “a construction that regularly conceals its genesis: the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions” (2500). This could certainly be applied to nineteenth-century Brazil, in which the differences between men's and women's personalities and roles were so emphatically declared that people could have easily overlooked their arbitrary nature. Machado's recourse to the fantastic constitutes a performance and exaggeration of those concepts of gender, allowing us to realize how problematic they are. His fantastic stories, which are all explicitly or implicitly narrated by men, expose the silencing

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<sup>29</sup> The presence of similar tropes and critiques in both his fantastic short stories and his novels may signify that the short stories were trial runs for his novels, constituting his attempt to discover how to incorporate the criticism he wanted without being too blatant about it. Fitz claims that in *Ressurreição* (1872) Machado “has not yet decided the question of how he wants to develop his female characters or why, though he clearly recognizes their importance to his project” (77). It is reasonable, therefore, to view his short stories (especially his earlier ones) as explorations of themes that he will later come back to and expand in his novels.

of women's voices in his time, without passing a clear judgment on whether it is right or not. This and other views about politics and gender are never "thrust upon the reader," but they are "always there for the careful reader to discern" (Fitz 5). While Machado's attacks on patriarchy may not be as glaring as those of today's authors and critics, they are present in his works in the form of the four tropes analyzed in Chapters 1 and 2. Studying these ubiquitous tropes in Machado's fantastic can lead us to believe that he is sexist. Alternatively, they can lead us to conclude that Machado places these tropes—these arbitrary views of gender—on display for his readers to see their ineffectiveness, and to appreciate the extent to which real men and women resist categorization. By doing so, he accomplishes what Butler describes as rendering gender "thoroughly and radically *incredible*" (2501). Machado's presentation of women in his fantastic fiction is an effort to show the negative consequences of pigeon-holing women into stereotypical roles. Instead of proposing new female stereotypes in these stories, Machado shows how perpetuating old ones leads to suffering and death. The images of the *femme fragile* and *femme fatale* appear in these stories to help us recognize that no woman (or man) fits perfectly into any stereotype. Focusing on that fact allows us to see that each of these fantastic stories "is not a tale about an actual woman, but a story about the narrator's perception of that woman" (Duncan 134-35). Through reading these stories, readers' own conceptions of what is possible can be challenged and subverted, paving the way for more productive ways of seeing gender and other aspects of society. Machado's short stories—especially his fantastic ones—are what Dixon calls "uma espécie de vírus" that challenge and problematize binary ways of thinking (109). They draw attention to the problems faced by Brazilian society and motivate readers to view women not as "a single monolithic entity" (Fitz 97), but as individuals. This perception of women is

fantastic (beyond reality) to the patriarchal ideas of nineteenth-century Brazilian society, but it is crucial in constructing healthier ways of viewing gender and society as a whole.

### Final Thoughts

This study has attempted to help fill in a gap in Machadian studies by analyzing the major female characters of his fantastic fiction. Fitz writes that focusing on individual aspects of “Machado’s art” is valuable but that “it must always be understood in the context of its relationships with the other elements of his work” (214). In harmony with this statement, I recognize that the present study does not cover every aspect of Machado’s fantastic stories (or even of women in those stories). At the end of this study, I echo Raimundo Magalhães Júnior’s statement from the preface to *Machado de Assis: Contos fantásticos*: “Não pretendemos, com estas breves observações, exaurir o estudo dos elementos fantásticos na obra machadiana, isto é tarefa por cumprir, pois a obra machadiana se oferece a múltiplas leituras e muito há ainda por ser dito” (38). This study does not claim to have exhausted the theme of women in the Machadian fantastic. Rather, it explores one of the many “plausible lines of interpretation” (Fitz 5) available in Machado’s fantastic fiction. That multiplicity of possible readings is precisely what makes his work resistant to closure and, in the face of attempts to find the “right” way to interpret Machado, makes it truly fantastic.

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