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A experiência machadiana: Experience Design

Theory in *Dom Casmurro*

Dania Genine Ellingson

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

A experiência machadiana: Experience Design
Theory in *Dom Casmurro*

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Master of Arts

The intricate and complex writing style of Machado de Assis' novel *Dom Casmurro* create a unique and powerfully engaging reader experience. While much has been discussed with regard to narratology and reader-response theory in *Dom Casmurro*, Machado's writing recalls many principles found in the cross-disciplinary field of experience design. Through an analysis of the novel using flow and co-creation theories, we see that Machado designs an extraordinary reader experience through narrational scaffolding and co-creative invitations. These elements engage readers in challenging and immersive ways, ultimately encouraging readers to develop their reading capacity throughout their contact with the novel. In *Dom Casmurro*, Machado's experiential writing enables readers to work together with the author to create two significant products: both the novel itself and—perhaps most important—the co-creative experience the novel facilitates.

Keywords: Machado de Assis, *Dom Casmurro*, narratology, reader-response theory

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A experiência machadiana: Experience Design Theory in *Dom Casmurro*

Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis (1839–1908) is an experiential author. His intricate and complex writing style creates a powerful experience as his texts demand that his readers actively engage with them, grappling with ambiguities along the way. Like most great literature, the distinguishing factor of the writings of Machado de Assis is not found in the rate at which readers come to his texts, but in how long they stay to discuss and explore his writings. He opens his texts to multiple interpretations, allowing each reader to bring his or her paradigms and perspectives to the text. Experience design methodology provides a lens through which we can further explore the significance of this kind of reading experience. The qualities of Machado's writing style recall many principles discussed in the cross-disciplinary field of experience design, which seeks to understand the characteristics of structured experiences. Mat Duerden describes a structured experience as one in which "a provider is intentionally staging an experience" (198). While there is no guarantee in how an individual will interpret a given experience, the aim of experience design is to intentionally create experiences with a high likelihood of significantly and positively impacting participants. In this thesis, the staged experience that will be discussed is the reader experience of interacting with Machado's novel *Dom Casmurro* (1899). In the decades after the publication of *Dom Casmurro*, readers have encountered a wide variety of interpretations of the text—and these new interpretations continue to shape increasingly complex and rich discussions. The variety in the interpretations and discussions surrounding *Dom Casmurro* are the result of a unique reader experience that Machado creates by first preparing readers to engage and then demanding their participation in the creation of the text. Regarding Machado's approach in many of his novels, Earl Fitz aptly states, "[the author] actually makes his reader become not merely involved but *actively involved* in the interpretation of the text"

(49). By establishing a narrational structure in which readers deepen their skills as active readers while simultaneously co-creating in the interpretation of the novel, Machado de Assis enables readers to work with the author in creating two significant products: the narration itself and—perhaps most important—the co-creative experience that the novel facilitates.

Introduction to Experience Design

Reader-response theory and experience design share points of contact in considering the readers' perspectives, allowing for individual interpretation, and acknowledging that the deepest meaning of a text is found in the reader. Roland Barthes famously declares that a text “is a space of many dimensions” (520) that allows for infinite individual interpretations and interactions with an otherwise finite collection of chapters within a book. Susan Feagin speaks specifically to the active role of the reader when she writes, “[T]hose who appreciate a work of literature typically become involved with it and respond to it” (1). Wolfgang Iser further expounds on this interaction between reader and text by stating, “[I]t is the gaps, the fundamental asymmetry between text and reader, that give rise to communication in the reading process” (23). He continues: “Whenever the reader bridges the gaps, communication begins” (24). Reader-response theory clearly explores the points of entry in which the reader may begin to take an active role in the reading process, ultimately taking advantage of dimensions, involvement, and gaps to create communication.

The primary distinction between the two theoretical frameworks is that reader-response focuses primarily on the readers' *interpretation* of the text while experience design centers on the experience readers have in their *interactions* with the text. Concepts frequently referenced in the experience design methodology, such as flow and co-creation theories, highlight the components

of experiences that either attract participants to or drive them away from a deeper engagement with a given experience. These theories offer insights to the prerequisites for what Mat Duerden calls extraordinary experiences.¹ In their applications to *Dom Casmurro*, both flow and co-creation theories help us understand and appreciate the process through which author and readers together implement and achieve the final product—an extraordinary reading experience.

The field of experience design is difficult to define, even for those deeply immersed in the subject. Duerden explains that it is currently recognized as more of a methodology than a distinct discipline in and of itself, but it has rapidly expanded over the last two decades and scholars are now moving to develop a unified body of terminology and theoretical framework to enable collaboration. Prominent contributors to the development of this methodology are typically scholars with backgrounds in fields such as business and leisure science studies, but the discussion has expanded to include applications in fields ranging from event design to information systems. As such, experience design is relevant to nearly every field of study that incorporates some kind of participatory interaction. Despite some ambiguity in the terminology used within this developing field of study, there are some powerful and well-established theoretical frameworks that offer unique insights into literary studies. We will use two of these theories—flow and co-creation—to analyze the experiential structure in *Dom Casmurro*.

Flow theory is a fundamental theoretical framework within experience design. Introduced by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in his book *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, the theory discusses the human “optimal experience”—what it is, and what

¹ Duerden describes extraordinary experiences in contrast to ordinary experiences and specifies that the distinction between the two relates “to frequency rather than perceived importance” (201). An extraordinary experience is “[A]n experience where the nature of the objective elements is such that they attract and hold an individual’s attention thereby producing strong subjective reactions exhibiting emotion, discovery, and change” (201). Within the category of extraordinary experiences are three additional classifications: memorable, meaningful, and transformational. While these sub-classifications are valuable, for the purposes of this article I will not make a distinction between them and will refer simply to extraordinary experiences.

circumstances are necessary to achieve it. According to Csikszentmihalyi, individuals achieve optimal experience when they become so immersed in an activity that they lose awareness of space and time in a state of extreme focus. The experience is driven by intrinsic motivation and can be achieved only when participants' skillsets are appropriately paired with the task at hand: if the task is too challenging, they will quickly become overwhelmed; if the it is too simplistic, they will become bored and lose interest. When the participants' skills meet the level of the challenge, however, they enter a state of extreme focus and engage the full spectrum of their abilities in order to complete the task at hand. This essential balance can be applied to any human activity. In fact, Csikszentmihalyi's subsequent books expand the concept of flow to address a wide variety of specialized topics such as creativity, education, business, and sports.² Similarly, flow is applicable to literature and the reader experience. Machado de Assis' *Dom Casmurro* contains many elements of flow theory woven throughout its text. These elements, while enlightening in their own right, are especially enriching when combined with co-creation theory.

Co-creation theory, sometimes referred to as value co-creation theory, aims to create meaning and value by allowing an individual to participate in the creation of the experience itself.³ A co-creative approach to designing experiences aims to create a mental shift in the way that the participant engages with the activity. As explained by Ana Cláudia Campos, co-creation tactics work by "enhancing attention and the memorability of the experience . . . by focusing the [participant's] attention" (1309). She describes co-creation as a "process of interrelated interactions and activities" that connect the participants with those implementing the structure of

² See for example Csikszentmihalyi's works: *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*; *Applications of Flow in Human Development and Education*; *Good Business: Leadership, Flow, and the Making of Meaning*; and *Flow in Sports*.

³ For a comprehensive review of the development of co-creation theory, see Marco Galvagno's article, "Theory of Value Co-creation. A Systematic Literature Review."

the activity, defining experiences as “the context in which those interactions and activities occur” (1311). Under a co-creative model, companies create a single structure for an experience that individual participants then adapt to their needs and desires to create a uniquely personalized and deeply significant experience for themselves.

Experiencing Flow in *Dom Casmurro*

The immersive experience of flow is one method by which an extraordinary experience can be achieved. In *Dom Casmurro*, Machado creates an environment conducive to the flow experience through embedded scaffolding that supports readers as they progress in their reading and co-creative abilities. Flow in reading requires a constant balance between the challenges of the text and readers’ abilities, which continually change as they gain experience with the text. This thesis will focus on flow theory in the context of this balance between challenge and abilities, as it is a foundational element of the theory. In order to provide a dynamic experience, the author must somehow use the static medium of the text to enable a fluid interaction, which accommodates the shifts in readers’ needs by matching the challenge of the text to their expanding abilities. Through the textual scaffolding in *Dom Casmurro*, Machado guides readers through an iterative process of both narrational and co-creative discovery by providing the necessary support in the early phases of their interaction with the novel while simultaneously offering more complex challenges that emerge only when readers begin to engage with the text on a deeper level. These strategies expand readers’ capacity and enable them to rise to the challenge of the text.

On the narrational level, Machado facilitates a flow reading experience through textual scaffolding in *Dom Casmurro*, supporting readers as they work through a challenging narrative

structure to discern the core storyline of the novel. Even the most attentive and skilled reader could easily become disoriented and frustrated with the twisting layers of metanarrative structure, flashbacks, unreliable narration, and contradicting literary references.⁴ But Machado's embedded clues provide the structure and direction necessary to direct readers through the reading process, resulting in a more immersive and consuming experience—both key characteristics of the state of flow. Hélio de Seixas Guimarães observes that Machado writes to “help and guide the reader through the fictional space” and that the author uses techniques such as “referring to books, people, and events of the period” to create “a common ground between the reader and the narrator” (“Fictionalizations” 207). These intertextual connections are a form of scaffolding that provide readers with a starting point from which they may begin to understand and interact with the text. On both a simple and a complex level, Machado uses narrational scaffolding to support readers and facilitate a flow experience through their ascension to a more advanced reader involvement.

Simple narrational scaffolding helps readers to experience flow in their early interactions with the novel by providing guidelines that do not require background knowledge of the text for interpretation. Although straightforward, simple narrational scaffolding does not necessarily denote ease. While Machado de Assis creates challenges for his readers, he also provides them with the necessary tools to have an impactful interaction with the novel. Antonio Luciano Tosta speaks to this scaffolded interaction between author and reader: “Hans Robert Jauss nota que todo texto tem um ‘aesthetic character’ que irá ‘indicate for the reader’ que caminho seguir para decodificá-lo . . . [E]ste caráter estético é responsabilidade e consequência do esforço e do

⁴ For further discussion on these themes, see the following works: “Strategies of Deceit: Dom Casmurro” by Marta de Senna; *Machado de Assis: O escritor que nos lê* by Hélio de Seixas Guimarães; “Machado in English” by Daphne Patai; and *Dom Casmurro* by Machado de Assis, by Marta Peixoto.

trabalho intelectual do autor” (44). The narrational structure of *Dom Casmurro* is demanding, yet Machado leaves scattered clues to direct readers. Specifically, Machado de Assis, *not* the narrator Dom Casmurro, intentionally leaves the clues⁵. While the autodiegetic narrator Dom Casmurro intends is to convincingly present and defend his case to his readers, Machado de Assis aims to create a powerful reader experience, which he does primarily through the use of Dom Casmurro’s voice as narrator. These techniques draw readers in to a state of intense focus, another key characteristic of flow, as they decode the clues provided, thereby establishing momentum that enables a flow experience throughout their progression in the novel.

One such clue is Machado’s use of repeated phrases to direct the readers to identify the narrator’s intention in his narration. This repetition is seen in Dom Casmurro’s description of Capitu’s eyes throughout the novel. José Dias first describes her eyes when he asks Bentinho, “Você já reparou nos olhos dela? São assim de cigana oblíqua e dissimulada” (931). At the time, this description strikes a chord in Bentinho’s mind, which later influences Dom Casmurro’s narration. Through the frequently repeated variations of this phrase throughout the novel, Machado calls the readers’ attention to his narrator Dom Casmurro’s intentions: that is, to cause the readers to question the integrity and fidelity of Capitu. It is essential that the readers develop a clear perception of the narrator’s intentions, as this perception anchors them in an essential understanding of the narrator’s characterization and influences the way in which they perceive the information that he offers to them throughout the novel. By providing the opportunity for readers to discover Dom Casmurro’s nature early on in the text, Machado reduces the likelihood

⁵ In their article “The Intentional Fallacy,” W. K. Wimsatt and M. C. Beardsley argue that the author’s intent is irrelevant to the interpretation of the text. They write that a text “is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it” (470). However, an analysis of the text using the theories of flow and especially co-creation reveals that the structure provided by the author is crucial to understanding the nature of this immersive and co-creative reader experience.

of readers becoming abruptly removed from the state of flow by suddenly questioning the narrator's reliability in their later interactions with the novel. This technique is especially powerful because it simultaneously facilitates the early stages of flow while also preemptively protecting the readers' flow experience for the more complex interactions that follow.

Simple narrational scaffolding does not always indicate one correct interpretation of the text. Another excellent example of this tool is in the opposing references that narrator Dom Casmurro makes to Antoine François Prévost's *L'histoire du chevalier des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut* (1731) and William Shakespeare's *Othello* (1565), which effectively invite readers deeper into the state of flow concentration by providing them with specific introductory steps to follow in their exploration of the text. Guimarães refers to this opposition in interpretations as an example of "paradigmas múltiplos" in Machado's writing. Regarding the evolution of the interpretation aided by these literary references, Guimarães states:

Por muitos e muitos anos, as interpretações correntes enfatizaram a referência francesa, naturalizando a dupla comparação sugerida por ele: a de Bentinho com o cavaleiro Des Grieux, jovem de boa família, rapazinho simpático e ingênuo, e a de Capitu com a mocinha libertina e pérfida, ao mesmo tempo ingênuo e mentirosa Manon Lescaut, protagonista do romance. . . . Foi na década de 1960 que a referência a Shakespeare, presente num momento crucial da narrativa, tornou-se paradigma dominante na interpretação do romance. Ao atentar para a leitura distorcida que o personagem-narrador, Bento Santiago, faz do destino trágico de Desdêmona, a crítica norte-americana Helen Caldwell chamou a atenção para o caráter mistificador da narrativa construída por Dom Casmurro, propondo *Otelo* como principal chave de leitura e modificando substancialmente o sentido atribuído ao romance. (*O escritor que nos lê* 62–63)

The process of utilizing the narrational tools provided, in this case a textual nod to international literary works, is fairly straightforward. Readers must simply identify the reference and use it for a comparative study between the two texts, allowing the storyline of one to augment the understanding of the other. In practice, however, this technique simultaneously supports and challenges Machado's readers. While each reference provides an easily digestible interpretation, the challenge lies in the fact that, depending on which literary reference the readers choose to prioritize, the interpretations have the potential to completely oppose one another. As such, readers can begin with a simple interpretation of the textual references and gradually increase their immersion in the text by grappling with opposing interpretations, again striking the necessary balance between skill and challenge in order to achieve and maintain flow. Seixas Guimarães calls these opposing interpretations "leituras discordantes" when he writes that they are "[C]apaz de abrigar leituras discordantes entre si, variáveis em função da projeções que o leitor empírico faz dos seus próprios valores e crenças sobre o texto radicalmente ambíguo do romance" (*Leitores* 216). Regarding his observation, James Remington Krause states that "[T]hese 'leituras discordantes' . . . allow readers to bring their own values and beliefs into the process of co-creation" (72). In terms of active and participative reading and the achievement of flow, the most important aspect is not which interpretation is correct, but the fact that these opposing literary references make it possible to have textually supported, yet contradictory interpretations. The exercise of engaging the text on a deeper level and thinking critically about the narration itself serves as a step in the scaffolding to allow readers to grow into the challenge, thus achieving the pairing of challenge and skillset and enabling readers to experience flow even in their early interactions with the novel.

In comparison, complex narrational scaffolding in the novel facilitates the continuation of flow by challenging readers to a closer, more intricate reading of the text, and guiding them through the narration on a level that assumes a foundational understanding of the novel. Many of these examples are so deeply encrypted that it would be impossible for readers to interpret the meanings unless they had already closely read the novel, which indicates the need for repeated readings of *Dom Casmurro* in order to access the complete reader experience. The reader experience with this novel is an iterative process that grows in complexity as the skills of the readers grow, thus meeting the most basic conditions for readers to experience flow, in both the first and subsequent readings of the text.

Machado embeds encrypted foreshadowing into the narration, which holds little meaning (and therefore draws little attention) to first-time readers but provides rich insights to those who already possess a background knowledge of the text. It is these encrypted elements that enables a fluid interaction with the text. Through the information embedded within the narration, Machado provides the increasing challenges necessary for repeat-readers to sustain a flow experience, but he also masterfully disguises the challenges to appear only when readers' abilities are equal to that of the task. Perhaps the most well-known example of encrypted foreshadowing occurs early in the novel when Dom Casmurro states, "Cantei um *duo* terníssimo, depois um *trio*, depois um *quatuor*..." (915). Here, Machado alludes to events to come, which Juracy Assmann Saraiva interprets as follows: "O *duo* que cantou refere-se ao período de enamoramento, em que ele e Capitu eram o tenor e a soprano da ópera; o *trio* está relacionado à vida de casados e à entrada de Escobar na relação do casal. E, por fim, o *quatour* presentifica o nascimento do filho, que constitui o quarto cantor da ópera" (48). A first-time reader will likely gloss over a reference of this complexity, but an attentive repeat-reader will glean valuable tools in this passage for

interpreting the narration for the remainder of the novel. This passage is embedded and encrypted in such a way that first-time readers may not even notice it, which allows them to focus on the challenges that are equal to their skill level at the given moment. When readers' skills have improved and they are prepared for a more complex challenge, however, the passage becomes more prominent, calling attention to itself and its implications. Again, this allows the balance of challenge and preparation to be maintained through readings and re-readings of the text, deeply engaging the readers and facilitating a flow experience throughout the entire journey.

Another example of complex narrational scaffolding is found in Chapter LIX, "Convivas de boa memória," where Machado models to his readers that they will encounter substantial gaps in the narration. This prepares readers for the narrational challenges to come, allowing them to continue without losing their forward momentum in flow when they are asked to rise to increasing demands. In this chapter, Machado speaks through his narrator and alludes to the major gaps to come in the narration when Dom Casmurro states, "[N]ada se emenda bem nos livros confusos, mas tudo se pode meter nos livros omissos" (968). This passage indirectly warns readers that they cannot rely on the text alone to have a complete picture of the story and must, instead, actively read the text in order to effectively fill in what is missing. Krause states: "This particular chapter [Chapter LIX] explicitly summarizes Machado de Assis' aim to openly include readers in the process of constructing and interpreting the text" (74). Machado provides the reader with evidence that the text in and of itself does not contain all the answers regarding the complete story. This evidence is confirmed at the end of the novel when Dom Casmurro writes, "Aqui devia ser o meio do livro, mas a inexperiência fez-me ir atrás da pena, e chego quase ao fim do papel, com o melhor da narração por dizer" (1003). This statement is abrupt when read on

its own, but since the readers are prepared for the narrational gaps much earlier on in the novel, their experience in a state of flow is not jeopardized by the jolt. This preparation becomes especially meaningful to repeat readers, who can grasp the full implications of Dom Casmurro's intention to create a "livro omissivo," (968) and utilize this scaffolding as a cue to adjust their reading style accordingly. In this chapter, Machado guides readers through a flow experience by establishing a pattern of expected co-creation, upon which he builds throughout the novel.

Co-creative scaffolding creates an immersive flow experience by preparing readers for their new partnership with the author to construct the text and its meaning. This relationship is modeled by a variety of interactions between the narrator Dom Casmurro (who believes himself to be the author) and his narratees,⁶ which allows real-world readers⁷ to draw connections to their own reader-relationships with Machado de Assis. Throughout the novel, Dom Casmurro addresses friends, enemies, church leaders, characters in the novel, and even specifically the female audience.⁸ While there is much to be unpacked in the nuances of these different readers, for the purpose of exploring the co-creative scaffolding effect, it is the existence of this variety that counts. Through the varied interactions between narrator and author, the real-world readers are presented with options on how to interpret the text, thus outlining steps to enable the readers to begin to co-create within the text. These options give readers a starting point for their own

⁶ The term *narratee* was coined by Gerald Prince in his 1971 and 1985 articles and refers to the fictive individual to whom the narrator writes.

⁷ Within the study of narratology, there are several terms used to identify the individual who reads the text. Perhaps the most common is Wayne Booth's "implied reader," which assumes the author's ideal recipient of the text. This term most closely resembles the reader which I discuss in that any experience design requires a degree of assumption regarding the nature of the participants. However, a significant difference between the two lies in the fact that there is no such thing as an ideal interaction within co-creation. The entire purpose of this technique is to create an experience that is ideal to the *participant*, not the facilitator. For this reason, I will not use previously established narratological terms, and will instead use the term "real-world reader" to refer to Machado's readers throughout this section.

⁸ For a discussion on the various roles played by Dom Casmurro's narratees, see the following works: *Os leitores de Machado de Assis* by Hélio de Seixas Guimarães, "The Rhetoric of Verisimilitude" by Silvano Santiago, and *Machado de Assis and Feminism: Re-Reading the Heart and Companion* and "Machado de Assis and the Beloved Reader" by Maria Manuel Lisboa.

immersive interactions with the text, allowing them to steadily continue in the development of their skills as active participants. Here, I explore the applications as seen through the contrast between sympathetic and unsympathetic narratees.

The relationship between sympathetic narratees and Dom Casmurro facilitates the flow experience by providing a form of introductory scaffolding, primarily benefitting readers who are new to the text. These textual interactions represent the choice to accept the narration as presented by Dom Casmurro by showing a relationship of friendship and understanding between narrator and narratee. Dom Casmurro frequently refers to the narratees in terms such as “meu caro leitor” and “leitor amigo” (915), demonstrating a proximity in their relationship. Through Dom Casmurro’s warm interactions with the sympathetic narratee, Machado’s writing models that the easiest approach to interact with the novel is for the real-world reader to accept the text as it is presented. This technique is seen in Chapter XXX, which opens with Dom Casmurro stating, “Terás entendido que . . .” (43). Here, the narrator implies that he is speaking to an attentive narratee, willing to take everything presented in the text as truth, which demonstrates to the real-world readers that they can do the same. The metaphorical interaction between the narrator and his sympathetic narratees extends the opportunity for real-world readers to enter a similar relationship with author Machado de Assis, thus inviting them to become more immersed in their experience with the text.

This basic scaffolding is an entry-point where real-world readers begin to see themselves as more than a passive observer existing outside of the story. It draws them into a deeper and more comprehensive experience and is the first step toward developing their ability to comprehend what it means to be an active participant of the text. The flow experience comes as a result of real-world readers continually progressing toward deeper and more significant

interactions with the text. The model of the sympathetic narratee is an important stepping stone, but it is not intended to be a final destination. Rather, it is a guiding structure to protect the state of flow as readers move into the discovery of their role as co-creators of the text.

In contrast to the sympathetic narratees, the unsympathetic narratees depicted in the text enable real-world readers to continue in the state of flow by demonstrating that they may also choose to question the text and insert their own perspectives to create a cohesive narrative whole. This form of readership is a step deeper than the barely-active acceptance modeled by Dom Casmurro's sympathetic narratee, encouraging the reader to advance further with each subsequent reading. It demonstrates to real-world readers that, despite the fact the narrator does not want them questioning the text, they possess the power to do so. Having followed the scaffolding thus far, they are prepared to enter flow as they become engaged with the text in a more interactive way, but it is important to note that this does not happen in a linear fashion from the beginning to the end of the novel. Creation is an iterative, cyclical process involving brainstorming, drafting, and many phases of revision. As such, some of the most complex tools that Machado provides in *Dom Casmurro* are included at the beginning of the novel, and some of the simplest are not offered until the end. Machado's writing style allows readers to engage with elements of the text according to their individual needs at any given point in their experience with the novel.

The hostility that the narrator directs towards his unsympathetic narratees amplifies the challenge of a more participatory reading of the text, which steadily increases the need for readers to remain completely immersed in the task of participatory reading. Since Dom Casmurro wants complete control of the narrative, he becomes defensive when he perceives his narratee's disbelief or lack of trust. As such, he resorts to tactics such as name-calling: "Se isto

vos parecer enfático, *desgraçado leitor...*” (940, my emphasis). While Dom Casmurro expresses extreme displeasure in the doubt that he perceives in his narratee, his words simultaneously convey to the real-world readers that they have the option to disbelieve him. Machado works through his narrator to communicate that potential interpretations of the novel are not limited by Dom Casmurro’s desired outcome of the text. This interaction depicts a model of the challenging and involved relationship that they can hold with the author of the text. The more they choose to accept this model, the more complete their immersive flow experience will be.

Dom Casmurro’s interaction with his unsympathetic narratees facilitates the flow experience as well. One example of this is found in Chapter LXII: “se o não achas por ti mesmo, escusado é ler o resto do capítulo e do livro, não acharás mais nada, ainda que eu o diga com todas as letras da etimologia” (971). His hostility towards these narratees is again apparent as he suggests that they stop reading the chapter and the book altogether because they are questioning his claims. While Dom Casmurro clearly does not wish to engage in the give and take of a true conversation about his life story, Machado’s choice to include this relationship between narrator and unsympathetic narratee is a subtle nudge for the real-world readers of *Dom Casmurro* to consider a more engaged reading. The co-creative scaffolding that exists in the fictional interaction between narrator and narratees prepares real-world readers to discover their own perceptions and perspectives regarding the text. The novel provides opportunities to interact on a basic or advanced level according to their inclination, but the initial and preparatory invitation to co-create is extended metaphorically through the varied interactions between narrator and his narratee, and it is this metaphor that allows for a seamless transition to a deepening state of flow while co-creating the text.

Both the narrational and co-creative scaffolding structures embedded throughout the text provide readers with the tools necessary for readers to experience flow with the novel from the beginning and progressively deepen the experience as they grow their skills throughout the novel. This structure enables readers to gradually increase their ability to engage with the novel in a complex, meaningful, and immersive way. While *Dom Casmurro* is a challenging novel in many regards, it is possible for readers to experience flow—an optimal, engaging, and highly immersive experience—while reading it because each major challenge is paired with scaffolding to provide structure and guidance to readers as they navigate the complexities. Through this guiding structure, readers are enabled to interact with the text as a new kind of reader in a novel, co-creative relationship with the author.

The Co-Creative Experience in *Dom Casmurro*

Co-creation theory is centered on a model in which the experience provider creates a structure that guides, but does not restrict, participants throughout their experience. Much like the need to maintain a balance between challenge and skillset to achieve a flow experience, a co-creative experience must provide enough structure to facilitate the experience while simultaneously holding both the space and the necessity for participants to engage in the creation of the experience itself. In *Dom Casmurro*, Machado explicitly links readers to their responsibility to co-create within the text through his narrator's widely-referenced statement in Chapter LIX: “É que tudo se acha fora de um livro falho, leitor amigo. Assim preencho as lacunas alheias; assim podes também preencher as minhas” (968). Here, readers are directly and unavoidably linked to their responsibility to assume a participative, co-creational role. Machado leaves lacunae throughout the text in *Dom Casmurro* and it is the readers' role to fill them. In

this vein, Tosta refers to the reader as a “co-autor,” observing that Machado “convida [o leitor] a ser um co-autor, oferecendo-lhe liberdade de escolha e a possibilidade do movimento, mas também jamais deixa de sinalizar a importância do papel do autor” (52). This equal partnership between author and reader is a foundational component of the novel, as this distinguishing factor contributes significantly to the unique reader experience that it provides.

Machado anticipates seminal concepts of flow theory to post-modern fiction, strongly supporting the readers’ equal role with the author by using metafictional techniques that leave the text incomplete without the readers’ input. Linda Hutcheon writes that all metafiction “demands that [the reader] participate, that he engage himself intellectually, imaginatively, and affectively in its co-creation” (7). In *Dom Casmurro*, Machado frequently maximizes the power of metafiction to design a co-creative experience by utilizing his narrator as an intermediary between parties. Dom Casmurro is stubborn, controlling, and manipulative and, at first glance, appears to have taken over the narration entirely. Paul Dixon refers to the relationship between author and narrator when he observes that, “Machado intends to hold himself, the real author, in check, so that the fictional author may assert himself without interference” (49). A co-creative analysis of the text, however, reveals an alternate interpretation: Machado is not holding himself in check so that the *narrator* may assert himself unrestrained, but so that the *readers* may assert themselves through the process of co-creation. Machado embeds the invitations to co-create within Dom Casmurro’s blind spots, speaking carefully through him in such a way that the readers are directed and supported in their entry to a co-creative reader experience with the author, all while Dom Casmurro is none the wiser.

The narrator and titular protagonist Dom Casmurro provides an enriched co-creative experience for the readers through his uncompromising personality. Because he controls the

information available to the readers, Machado scatters clues throughout the text, which readers can only discover through active reading. In order to satisfy both the narrator and the real-world readers, Machado completes a balancing act to masterfully design a co-creative environment with which readers are asked to engage on intellectual and emotional planes. Through the use of an unreliable narrator, the inclusion of lacunae, and direct invitations for the readers to participate, Machado encourages his readers to gradually transition from passive to active reading to become co-creators of the text.

In the context of co-creation, Machado's decision to write through an unreliable narrator gives the readers permission to adjust any part of the novel as they deem necessary through co-creation. Marta Peixoto writes: "The key to interpreting *Dom Casmurro* lies with the narrator-protagonist and with our view of his designs and possible covert purposes" (219). As readers interact with a narrator who uses his role to manipulate readers and who maintains a general disregard for the value in a truthful narrative, they are invited to call the narrative into question and exercise their creative license to modify the text. Even the first-person format of the narration causes suspicion, as explained by William Riggan: "First-person narration is . . . always at least potentially unreliable, in that the narrator, with these human limitations of perception and memory and assessment, may easily have missed, forgotten or misconstrued certain incidents, words, or motives" (19–20). The fallibility of human nature requires readers to question the information provided through a first-person narrative such as this, and the need for questioning is only increased by the instability that he demonstrates throughout the novel.

Dom Casmurro demonstrates his unreliable tendencies through his efforts to manipulate the reader into adopting his viewpoint. In some instances, he speaks directly of his manipulative narrational strategies, as in the statement, "Há conceitos que se devem incutir na alma do leitor, à

força de repetição” (937). In this repetition, he intentionally favors certain pieces of the narrative over others with the intent of influencing the readers to accept his narrative. While the character Dom Casmurro is writing purely to persuade, Machado aims to give voice to his readers, which he does by utilizing narrator’s insecurities to embed clues for the readers. This single comment grants them permission to dig deeper through the entirety of the novel and directs their attention to a key component of the narration: the intentionally repeated statements scattered throughout the text.

Dom Casmurro wants his narratees to unquestioningly accept everything he presents—so much so that he actively anticipates their alternate interpretations in order to undermine them. Tosta speaks to this preemptive manipulation as he writes, “Uma outra forma muito comum da ‘ressaca’ machadiana é o narrador antecipar possíveis interpretações do leitor e, em seguida, tentar pô-las por ‘água abaixo,’ como se diz no linguajar popular” (48). Dom Casmurro does this with everything that could influence the readers’ perceptions of himself and his narrative, even down to the very definition of words. In the very first chapter of the novel, Dom Casmurro famously states, “Não consulte dicionário” in reference to the meaning of the word “casmurro,” which had been given to him as a nickname (906). His writing systematically attempts to drive readers to accept him as the only authority on the subject, working to dismantle any rivaling sources—even that of a dictionary. Regarding this, Marta de Senna writes in “Strategies of Deceit: Dom Casmurro”:

He starts his narration explaining himself through deceit: he informs the reader that his nickname, ‘Casmurro,’ must not be understood as it is defined in dictionaries, that is, as ‘stubborn,’ ‘obstinate,’ ‘wayward’—which, in fact, he is; rather according to Dom

Casmurro, it should be understood as a ‘quiet person who keeps himself to himself’—
which he is not. (407)

Dom Casmurro makes concerted efforts to manipulate readers’ perceptions of him from the very beginning. His bias is blatant, and it is that very bias that invites readers to do exactly the opposite of what the narrator wants—that is, to ask questions. Co-creation theory heavily emphasizes the importance of protecting space for participants’ interactions with and personal adaptations of an experience. It is this component of the theory that highlights opportunities for readers to deepen their interactions with the text and helps to tease out the distinction between the roles of narrator and author in *Dom Casmurro*. While the narrator does not desire a co-creative experience with the readers, Machado de Assis subtly uses these interactions to guide his readers to a more involved experience.

Dom Casmurro’s unreliability is also demonstrated in the fact that his priority in narrating is not to present a reliable narrative. The novel is scattered with evidences that he blatantly disregards the need to present a truthful narrative, as is aptly summarized in his statement, “Não examinei, mas deve ser verdade” (997). His greatest concern is to provide evidence that supports the case he is presenting, even if it means bending or omitting truthful components, and he only includes the portion that is beneficial to his argument. Krause writes that Dom Casmurro easily “glides over specific details when a broader perspective suffices” (72). The narrator maintains this pattern of disregard for a truthful narrative as he contradicts himself throughout the narration and as he uses literary references taken entirely out of context. In utilizing these irregularities in the narration, Machado provides yet another entry point for readers to ask questions and co-creatively engage with the text.

Dom Casmurro also presents inconsistent details in his narration, which forces readers to navigate through truth and fiction simultaneously. Throughout the novel, the narrator makes a concerted effort to paint Capitu in a negative light through subtle, even off-hand comments that foster a feeling of distrust. These comments include the previously-mentioned description of her eyes as belonging to a “cigana oblíqua e dissimulada” and being “olhos de ressaca” (931, 940), as well as more subtle references, such as his description of how, immediately following her first kiss with Bentinho, she behaved as if nothing had happened when her mother arrived. Dom Casmurro writes: “Éramos dois e contrários, ela encobrindo com a palavra o que eu publicava pelo silêncio” (941). These remarks sway readers to distrust Capitu and her character. However, Dom Casmurro also makes contradictory positive comments such as, “Capitu era naturalmente o anjo da Escritura” (988). These comments emphasize Capitu’s goodness, even holiness, and contradict everything that he intentionally presents in the narrative. This contradiction leads readers to grapple not only with the information in the narration, but also with the trust they place in narrator himself. As such, readers are more inclined to work together with Machado, rather than Dom Casmurro, to co-create, using their own perspectives and reasoning to distinguish truth from fiction in the text. They co-create by beginning with the text provided, sifting through what they determine to be truth and fiction, and expanding upon it to create their own personal interpretations.

Dom Casmurro also demonstrates a disregard for a reliable narrative as he manipulates literary references, taking them out of context and incorrectly using them to support his argument. Marta de Senna summarizes:

The use of truncated citations, this picking up of a passage totally out of context, generally out of the macrotext of a classic or the Bible, serves the Machadian narrator in

a particularly profitable way. Sometimes he will not even quote from other authors but merely allude to this or that poet in a vague and imprecise way, enabling the interested reader to choose between accepting the imprecision or attempt to precisely identify the allusion in order to try to understand why and what for such and such an author is occasionally summoned to the text. (409)

The narrator, though himself attempting to manipulate the readers into adopting the narrative of his victimhood, serves the author's greater purpose to establish and protect space for the readers to co-create within the text. For example, in Chapter XXXII Dom Casmurro vaguely references Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* (1320) when he writes:

Há de dobrar o gozo aos bem-aventurados do céu conhecer a soma dos tormentos que já terão padecido no inferno os seus inimigos; assim também a quantidade das delícias que terão gozado no céu os seus desafetos aumentará as dores aos condenados do inferno. Este outro suplício escapou ao divino Dante; mas eu não estou aqui para emendar poetas. (939–40)

Here, he uses a literary reference to support his claim while simultaneously making corrections to Dante's text. Ironically, Dom Casmurro also states that his intention is not to correct poets, but to simply share his story. He expertly weaves these conflicting components into his narrative in such a way that, should the readers choose, they could reasonably pass over them without a second thought. But the inconsistencies that these literary references create in the narration also prompt readers to critically interact with the text by digging deeper into each reference and teasing out the implications of its inclusion at that given point in the narrative. Readers who engage on this more profound level will once again discover that Dom Casmurro is an unreliable narrator and, as such, they must assume the responsibility of discerning fact from fiction in

everything that Dom Casmurro presents. This filtering process is a co-creative one in which the readers use and reconstruct the reality presented to create an alternative interpretation that they perceive to be truthful and correct.

Machado strategically places gaps in the narration where readers are asked to operate on an intermediary level of co-creation. In these instances, readers have increased freedom to adjust the text, but they also have the choice to gloss over the gaps should they feel overwhelmed by the task. In Chapter LII, Machado embeds a model of co-creation in the text as Dom Casmurro reflects on the creation and interpretation of sonnets and comments, “[T]udo é dar-lhe uma idéia e encher o centro que falta” (964). While the narrator is specifically discussing poetry, he unwittingly provides readers with guidelines on how they should interact with his own narration. This summarizes the co-creative narrational structure that is woven throughout the entire novel. Machado writes the character Dom Casmurro so that he presents the structure of an idea in his narration but leaves the center empty for readers to fill in according to their creative inclinations. Dom Casmurro desires to maintain the maximum control over his narration and, therefore, is not a willing participant in this invitation to co-creation. Rather, Machado works through Dom Casmurro’s blind spots to strategically insert opportunities for the readers to co-create. As Dom Casmurro includes most of these lacunae, he is unaware of the control that he gives the readers as a result. Machado works through his narrator’s lapsing memory and his tendency to become distracted to create opportunities for readers’ participation.

As Dom Casmurro narrates his life experiences, his fallible memory causes him to leave lacunae throughout the narration. In these examples, he is direct about the incompleteness of the narration, seemingly unaware of the co-creative power that he gives to the readers by so doing. Dom Casmurro openly acknowledges how much time has passed between the occurrence of the

events that he describes in his narration and his recording of them as he writes: “É claro que as reflexões que aí deixo não foram feitas então, a caminho do seminário, mas agora no gabinete do Engenho Novo” (996). Textual evidences indicate gaps in his memory, such as when he describes his plans to commit suicide: “Leitor, houve aqui um gesto que eu não descrevo por havê-lo inteiramente esquecido, mas crê que foi belo e trágico” (1035). Dom Casmurro seems to be under the impression that he was filling in a lacuna by providing additional information—despite his uncertainty regarding the veracity of the statement—he is, in actuality, *creating* a lacuna. He admits to having “inteiramente esquecido,” which tells the readers that they must enter and “encher o centro que falta.” Dom Casmurro’s attempts to fill in the gaps in his narration are a dog whistle conversation between Machado and his readers, a signal that readers can insert their perspectives. This process of filling in the missing center is the crux of the co-creative process, as the text provides the structure with which the reader can interact freely.

Dom Casmurro’s uncertainty gives readers a choice between belief or disbelief of the narrator’s claims. In developing this character, Machado de Assis creates a narrator who undermines his own manipulative efforts. Krause suggests that these expressions of a lapse in memory are an intentional technique that the narrator uses to manipulate the reader:

Either Dom Casmurro truly is forgetful, or he has a selective memory, choosing which elements to highlight and which to suppress. This second supposition is more likely in spite of his numerous claims that his memory is faulty. He draws attention to his unreliability even though his narration is highly detailed. Incongruities such as these cast shadows of doubt on his reliability and the reader wonders whether or not Dom Casmurro’s claims of a poor memory are simply a ruse. (72)

While the moments throughout the text in which Dom Casmurro did simply forget important details are also part of Machado's technique in protecting the space for co-creation, there are also instances in which Dom Casmurro demonstrates a certain intentionality in his forgetfulness. This, too, supports Machado's co-creative efforts, and Dom Casmurro appears to be entirely unaware that, as he utilizes his intentionally selective memory to shape the narrative into a condemnation of Capitu, he undermines his own narrational authority. He reflects: "Há tanto tempo que isto sucedeu que não posso dizer com segurança se chorou de veras, ou se somente enxugou os olhos" (951). Again, Dom Casmurro himself creates the lacuna through which readers may enter and begin to co-creatively interact with the text. He gives readers options to choose from—in this case, believing or disbelieving the sincerity of Capitu's tears—but his claim to a lapsing memory provides equal opportunity for readers to prefer one interpretation over another. Rather than being limited to blindly accepting what is presented to them, Machado reserves space for readers to paint their own portion as a part of the whole.

Other lacunae in the novel are the result of Dom Casmurro's numerous distractions and digressions. Machado uses these distractions to protect the character of the narrator while simultaneously establishing the space necessary for readers' role in co-creation. While the previous examples demonstrate Dom Casmurro leaving lacunae for the readers despite his best efforts to fill them, there are also many instances in which he leaves lacunae solely because he is too distracted to address them. He appears to be following some form of an outline, as is evidenced by his statement: "Mas não adiantemos; vamos à primeira parte" (915). But despite the supposed structure that Dom Casmurro wishes to impose, his execution adopts a stream-of-consciousness style in which he makes abrupt jumps from one thought to another. Within these

digressions, he frequently leaves thoughts entirely unfinished and the resulting lacunae are entry points for readers to become involved in the co-creative process.

In some instances, Dom Casmurro begins a thought and then completely abandons it, usually ending the phrase with an ellipsis. This grants readers ample opportunity to complete the thought themselves. Dom Casmurro describes a moment of reflection regarding Capitu's eyes: "A isto atribuo que entrassem a ficar crescidos, crescidos e sombrios, como tal expressão que..." (939). At this point, Dom Casmurro becomes distracted and never completes the thought he began. Through this distraction, Machado de Assis creates space for the readers to imagine and to co-create as if the author himself hands the pen to his readers, inviting them to take the narration in a direction he never intended. The introduction of the sentence provides sufficient context and direction to aid readers in gaining momentum, then Machado sets them free to determine the remainder of the textual direction on their own.

In other instances, Dom Casmurro leaves a thought trailing for a moment, as if becoming lost in thought, before returning to complete it. This is seen in Chapter XCII: "O diabo não é tão feio como se pinta," in which Dom Casmurro ends a paragraph by trailing off from, "Quero dizer..." (997). He then picks up where he left off in the opening sentence of the following paragraph: "Quero dizer que o meu vizinho de Matacavalos . . . dava à podridão das suas carnes um reflexo espiritual que as consolava" (997). This type of trailing-off lacuna requires a proactive reader as it opens an entry point for co-creation. Tosta suggests that the narrator does not intend to leave the text open for the readers' interpretation, writing that, "após 'abrir' e indicar algumas destas lacunas ao leitor . . . o narrador tenta 'fechá-las'" (47). But once opened, the text can never be completely closed again. In the pause created by Dom Casmurro's trailing off, his grip on the reader slackens. Flow is interrupted, guiding readers into a more alert and

involved approach to reading the novel. In that pause—however brief—Machado de Assis transfers control of that narrational moment from Dom Casmurro to his readers, and while Dom Casmurro does return to finish the sentence, he never fully regains complete autonomy over his narrative. Dom Casmurro, although assertive, is nothing more than a tool to engage Machado's real-world readers in a co-creative experience with the novel. This becomes even more evident in the direct invitations for the readers' participation.

Machado directly invites his readers to co-create both the text and their experience with it. While most of the invitations are subtle, there are several instances in which Machado extends a clear and direct invitation through his narrator. These invitations occur in two ways: first, the invitation for a synchronous co-creation between author and readers; and, second, the invitation for readers to take the author's creation as a point of departure in order to finish it.

Machado invites his readers to co-create synchronously by creating an environment in which real-world readers take on full and active participation while still relying on a familiar scaffolding structure. Synchronous co-creation is characterized by invitations voiced in the first-person plural and represents a co-creative structure that gives readers the impression of working together with the author at the same time. The narrational scaffolding combined with the direct invitation—and even expectation—to co-create is a distinguishing characteristic of the novel. Regarding the expectation of participation, Krause writes, “Machado infers that this text—the novel *Dom Casmurro*—is unlike other texts, which rely on a more passive reader. Readers of Machado's new kind of narrative, therefore, must actively engage in ascribing meaning and in drawing conclusions” (74). Deeply engaging the active reader creates a unique and effective experience. Machado places the readers on equal ground with the author as they work together—simultaneously—to navigate and co-create the text.

Machado also invites readers to co-create by speaking through striking chapter titles. This allows Machado to work around Dom Casmurro's manipulative desire to maintain complete narrational control, while also indicating co-creative opportunities to the readers. The titles of Chapters LXXIX and LXXX are interesting in this regard: "Vamos ao capítulo" and "Venhamos ao capítulo," respectively (986, 987). The use of the first-person plural in these chapter titles denotes a sense of inclusion by communicating to the readers in concrete terms that their involvement with the text is of the utmost importance. It conjures imagery of an otherwise hesitant reader joining together with the author to take a closer look at the text and to assume a more involved role. It appears Machado uses chapter titles as a means to communicate with the readers without the narrator's knowing. While Dom Casmurro presumably authors these chapter titles in the first-person plural, they subtly open up the metanarrative structure so that Machado can indirectly communicate with readers without drawing too much attention. Through this technique, Machado maintains the desired relationship between narrator and narratee while simultaneously directing and inviting his real-world readers to rise to a more advanced level of co-creation.

When Machado invites readers to synchronously co-create explicitly through the narrator, the invitation is much more nuanced and requires a more advanced reader to identify it. Take, for example, Dom Casmurro's comment in the final paragraph of Chapter II, "Eia, começemos a evocação por uma célebre tarde..." (907). This invitation is and must be more nuanced, as the narrator himself speaks it within the primary body of the text. Machado carefully encodes these directions by working through the blind spots of the narrator to place them in plain sight for the readers. Here, it becomes essential to differentiate the voice of the author from the voice of the narrator. While Tosta argues that "[Machado] às vezes parece não respeitar a individualidade da

experiência do leitor, mas sim, tentar impor o seu ritmo a este” (9), the careful separation of these voices through a co-creative perspective reveals an alternate interpretation. The theory of co-creation suggests that Machado is, in fact, intentionally providing space for readers to co-create within the text in a deeply individual manner, which he does by utilizing a narrator who does not respect their individual experiences. Dom Casmurro may speak as if inviting readers to follow along on his guided tour, but Machado and his experienced readers know that the true invitation is one to co-create the entire text.

In several moments in the novel, Machado appears to hand over to his readers the responsibility of creation entirely and walks away—as if to communicate that he has done his part, and it is now up to readers to complete the text themselves. Tosta speaks of this interaction occurring between narrator and reader as he writes, “em vários momentos o narrador entrega literalmente ao leitor a responsabilidade pela interpretação” (41). However, an analysis of the text using the theory of co-creation reveals that it is not Dom Casmurro’s intention to invite the reader to co-create, but rather it is evidence that Machado intentionally utilizes his narrator to create a co-creative experience. Throughout the novel, Machado provides readers with opportunities to gradually grow into the role as co-creators with the author. As readers go through this iterative process with the novel, they are gradually enabled to take full advantage of the co-creative experience and assume the complete responsibility of creation that Machado intended to pass on all along.

Machado works through Dom Casmurro’s sense of self-pity to create an opening for readers that communicates the need for co-creation, not only in that moment, but throughout the entire narration. As Dom Casmurro sets the stage for his narrative, he states, “[F]alto eu mesmo, e essa lacuna é tudo” (907). To Dom Casmurro, this statement serves primarily as a nod to his

pitiable state. He has lost everything, even his own self, and readers will soon learn of the source of his sadness, as well as the justifications of his actions that led to this state. To the active and co-creative reader, however, this phrase demonstrates that a central piece of the text to follow—the narrator and primary character—is *himself a lacuna*. As such, we can consider nothing in the novel as complete. Umberto Eco's words resonate when he writes of texts that are "'open' in a far more tangible sense. In primitive terms we can say that they are quite literally 'unfinished': the author seems to hand them on to the performer more or less like the components of a construction kit. He seems to be unconcerned about the manner of their eventual deployment"

(4). Machado appears unconcerned with the final state of the text as he readily turns the narration in its entirety over to readers to re-evaluate and re-create the text. The novel readers hold in their hands is not a final product; rather, *Dom Casmurro* is a draft intended to provide powerful and individual reader experiences as each reader works and reworks through the complexities contained therein.

Through the use of an unreliable narrator, the intentional placement of lacunae, and direct invitations for readers to increase their involvement, Machado de Assis creates an environment primed for an immersive and deeply involved reader experience. Readers find themselves included in a textual experience that requires an elevated level of thinking and a participatory interaction. They become increasingly immersed as they navigate encoded messages from an encouraging author sent through a controlling narrator. We cannot read *Dom Casmurro* passively. Machado de Assis employs narrative and metanarrative tools and techniques that join us as readers with him in a co-creative experience, adding a personal and unique value to the experience.

Conclusion

Machado de Assis' novel *Dom Casmurro* provides a powerfully crafted experience in which he supports and encourages us, his readers, to achieve the “optimal experience” while engaging with the text by responding to invitations to co-create. Through an analysis drawing from flow theory, we identify the key function of the scaffolding embedded throughout the novel, which enables us to have meaningful interactions with the novel from our earliest encounters. The author presents us with opportunities to strengthen our active reading skills through a guiding scaffolding structure, which consequently prepare us to meet these increasingly difficult textual challenges. As such, Machado presents us with a prime opportunity to have the optimal experience of flow, as described by Csikszentmihalyi. Prepared to take on the challenge presented in the structure of the novel, Machado also presents us with both subtle and direct opportunities to participate in the creation of the novel itself. This co-creative experience provides us with a deep intellectual and emotional connection to the text, which then encourages us to engage with it even further. Through his writing, Machado anticipates the theories of flow and co-creation, which are not straightforward processes and are not presented in a linear fashion in the novel. Rather, they are iterative, just as is the process of creation itself. Through a narrational structure that invites, enables, and requires readers to profoundly engage with the text, Machado facilitates the co-creation of the text itself and, more importantly, the co-creation of each reader's journey to an extraordinary reading experience.

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Appendix

Conference Length Paper

A experiência machadiana: Experience Design Theory in *Dom Casmurro*

Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis (1839–1908) is an experiential author. His intricate and complex writing style creates a powerful experience as he demands that his readers actively engage with the texts, grappling with ambiguities along the way. These qualities recall many principles discussed in the cross-disciplinary field of experience design, which seeks to intentionally design meaningful experiences. Many of the principles studied within experience design apply to Machado's novel *Dom Casmurro* (1899). Even decades after *Dom Casmurro* was published, the novel continues to foster increasingly complex and rich discussions. By establishing a narrational structure in which readers deepen their skills as active readers while simultaneously co-creating in the interpretation of the novel, Machado de Assis enables readers to work with the author in creating two significant products: the novel itself and—perhaps most important—the co-creative experience the novel facilitates.

Introduction to Experience Design

The field of experience design is difficult to define, even for those deeply immersed in the subject. Mat Duerden explains that it is currently recognized as more of a methodology than a distinct discipline in and of itself, but it has rapidly expanded over the last two decades and scholars are now moving to develop a unified body of terminology and theoretical framework to enable collaboration. Two key theoretical frameworks that guide experience design practices are flow and co-creation theories.

Flow theory was introduced by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in his book *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. It discusses the human “optimal experience”—what it is, and what circumstances are necessary to achieve it. According to Csikszentmihalyi, individuals achieve optimal experience when they become so immersed in an activity that they lose awareness of space and time in a state of extreme focus. The experience can be achieved only when participants’ skillsets are appropriately paired with the task at hand: if the task is too challenging, they will quickly become overwhelmed; if the task is too simplistic, they will become bored and lose interest. When the participants’ skills meet the level of the challenge, however, they enter a state of extreme focus and engage the full spectrum of their abilities to complete the task at hand, which is an essential characteristic of the flow experience.

Co-creation theory aims to create meaning and value by allowing an individual to participate in the creation of the experience itself⁹. A co-creative approach to designing experiences aims to create a mental shift in the way that the participant engages with the activity. Under a co-creative model, companies create a single structure for an experience, which individual participants then adapt to their needs and desires to create a uniquely personalized and deeply significant experience.

Experiencing Flow in *Dom Casmurro*

The immersive experience of flow is one method by which a powerful experience can be achieved. In *Dom Casmurro*, Machado creates an environment conducive to the flow experience through embedded scaffolding that supports readers as they advance in their reading and co-creative abilities. Flow in reading requires a constant balance between the challenges of the text

⁹ For a comprehensive review of the development of co-creation theory, see Marco Galvagno’s article, “Theory of Value Co-creation. A Systematic Literature Review.”

and readers' abilities, which continually change as they gain experience with the text. Through the textual scaffolding in *Dom Casmurro*, Machado guides readers through an iterative process of both narrational and co-creative discovery by providing the necessary support in the early phases while simultaneously offering more complex challenges that emerge only when readers begin to engage on a deeper level. These strategies expand their capacity and enable them to rise to the challenge of the text.

On the narrational level, Machado facilitates a flow reading experience through textual scaffolding in *Dom Casmurro*, which supports readers as they work through a challenging narrative structure to discern the core storyline of the novel. Machado's embedded clues provide the structure and direction necessary to direct readers through the reading process, resulting in a more immersive and consuming experience—both of which are key characteristics of the state of flow. Hélio de Seixas Guimarães observes that Machado writes to “help and guide the reader through the fictional space” and that Machado uses techniques such as “referring to books, people, and events of the period” to create “a common ground between the reader and the narrator” (Guimarães, “Fictionalizations” 207). These connections are a form of scaffolding that provide readers with a starting point from which they may begin to understand and interact with the text. Machado utilizes this scaffolding in two forms: narrational and co-creative scaffolding.

Narrational scaffolding supports readers to experience flow in their interactions with the novel by providing clues to direct readers through their interpretation of the text. One such clue is Machado's use of repeated phrases to direct the readers to identify the narrator's intention in his narration. This repetition is seen in *Dom Casmurro*'s description of Capitu's eyes throughout the novel. José Dias first describes her eyes when he asks Bentinho, “Você já reparou nos olhos dela? São assim de cigana oblíqua e dissimulada” (931). At the time, this description strikes a

chord in Bentinho's mind, which later influences Dom Casmurro's narration. Through the frequently repeated variations of this phrase throughout the novel, Machado calls the readers' attention to his narrator Dom Casmurro's intentions: that is, to cause the readers to question the integrity and reliability of Capitu. It is essential that the readers develop a clear perception of the narrator's intentions, as it anchors them in an essential understanding of the narrator's character and influences the way in which they perceive the information that he offers to them throughout the novel. By providing the opportunity for readers to discover this early on, Machado reduces the likelihood of readers becoming abruptly removed from the state of flow by suddenly questioning the narrator's reliability in their later interactions with the novel. This technique is especially powerful because it simultaneously facilitates the early stages of flow while also preemptively protecting the readers' flow experience for the more complex interactions that follow.

Co-creative scaffolding creates an immersive flow experience by preparing readers for their new partnership with the author to construct the text and its meaning. This relationship is modeled by a variety of interactions between narrator Dom Casmurro (who believes himself to be the author) and his narratees¹⁰, which allows real-world readers¹¹ to draw connections to their own reader-relationships with Machado de Assis. Throughout the novel, Dom Casmurro addresses friends, enemies, church leaders, specific characters in the novel, and even specifically

¹⁰ The term *narratee* was coined by Gerald Prince in his 1971 and 1985 articles and refers to the fictive individual to whom the narrator writes.

¹¹ Within the study of narratology, there are several terms used to identify the individual who reads the text. Perhaps the most common is Wayne Booth's "implied reader," which assumes the author's ideal recipient of the text. This term most closely resembles the reader which I discuss in that any experience design requires a degree of assumption regarding the nature of the participants. However, a significant difference between the two lies in the fact that there is no such thing as an ideal interaction within co-creation. The entire purpose of this technique is to create an experience that is ideal to the *participant*, not the facilitator. For this reason, I will not use previously established narratological terms, and will instead use the term "real-world reader" to refer to Machado's readers throughout this section.

the female audience¹². Through the varied interactions between narrator and author, the real-world readers are presented with options on how to interpret the text, which outlines steps to enable the readers to begin to co-create within the text. These options give readers a starting point for their own immersive interactions with the text, allowing them to steadily continue in the development of their skills as active readers. Here, we will explore the applications as seen through the contrast between the sympathetic and unsympathetic narratees.

The relationship between the sympathetic narratee and Dom Casmurro facilitates the flow experience by providing a form of introductory scaffolding, primarily benefitting readers who are new to the text. The sympathetic narratee introduces the choice to accept the narration as presented by Dom Casmurro by showing a relationship of friendship and understanding between narrator and narratee. Dom Casmurro frequently refers to the narratee in terms such as “meu caro leitor” and “leitor amigo” (915), demonstrating a proximity in their relationship. Through Dom Casmurro’s warm interactions with the sympathetic narratee, Machado’s writing models that the easiest approach to interact with the novel is for the real-world reader to accept the text as it is presented. This technique is seen in Chapter XXX, which opens with Dom Casmurro stating, “Terás entendido que...” (935). Here, the narrator implies that he is speaking to an attentive narratee, willing to take everything presented in the text as truth, which models to the real-world readers that they can do the same. The metaphorical interaction between the narrator and his sympathetic narratee extends the opportunity for real-world readers to enter a similar relationship with author Machado de Assis, thus inviting them to become more immersed in their experience with the text.

¹² For a discussion on the various roles played by Dom Casmurro’s narratees, see the following works: *Os leitores de Machado de Assis* by Hélio de Seixas Guimarães, “The Rhetoric of Verisimilitude” by Silvano Santiago, and *Machado de Assis and Feminism: Re-Reading the Heart and Companion* and “Machado de Assis and the Beloved Reader” by Maria Manuel Lisboa.

The unsympathetic narratee depicted in the text enables real-world readers to continue in the state of flow by demonstrating that real-world readers may also choose to question the text and insert their own perspectives to create a cohesive narrative whole. Since Dom Casmurro wants complete control of the narrative, he becomes defensive when he perceives his narratee's disbelief or lack of trust, resorting to tactics such as name-calling: "Se isto vos parecer enfático, *desgraçado leitor...*" (940, my emphasis). Machado works through his narrator to communicate that his real-world readers are not limited by Dom Casmurro's desired outcome of the text. In this interaction, readers see a model of the challenging and involved reader relationship that they can hold with the author of the text. They can gradually increase their ability to engage with the novel in a complex, meaningful, and immersive way, and which supports them as they develop into a new kind of reader in a co-creative relationship with the author.

The Co-creative Experience in Dom Casmurro

Co-creation theory is centered on a model in which the experience provider creates a structure that guides, but does not restrict, participants throughout their experience. In *Dom Casmurro*, Machado explicitly links readers to their responsibility to co-create within the text through his narrator's widely-referenced statement in Chapter LIX: "É que tudo se acha fora de um livro falho, leitor amigo. Assim preencho as lacunas alheias; assim podes também preencher as minhas" (968). Here, readers are directly and unavoidably linked to their responsibility to assume a participative, co-creational role. Machado leaves lacunae throughout the text in *Dom Casmurro*, and it is the readers' role to fill them. This equal partnership between author and reader is a foundational component of the novel, as this distinguishing factor contributes significantly to the unique reader experience that it provides.

In the context of co-creation, Machado's decision to write through an unreliable narrator gives the readers permission to adjust any part of the novel as they deem necessary through co-creation. As readers interact with a narrator who uses his role to manipulate readers and maintains a general disregard for the value in a truthful narrative, they are invited to call the narrative into question and exercise their creative license to modify the text. In the very first chapter of the novel, Dom Casmurro famously states, "Não consulte dicionário" in reference to the meaning of the word "casmurro," which had been given to him as a nickname (906). His writing systematically attempts to drive readers to accept him as the only authority on the subject, working to dismantle any rivaling sources—even that of a dictionary. His bias is blatant, but that very bias also invites readers to question the reliability of the text. While the narrator does not desire a co-creative experience with the readers, Machado de Assis subtly uses these interactions to guide his readers to a more involved reader experience.

Machado's co-creative writing style is also evidenced in his subtle placement of lacunae throughout the narration, which demands that readers co-create in order to complete the text. For example, as Dom Casmurro narrates his life experiences, his lapsing memory causes him to leave gaps throughout the narration. When this occurs, he is direct about the incompleteness of the narration, seemingly unaware of the co-creative power that he gives to the readers by so doing. Dom Casmurro openly acknowledges how much time has passed between the occurrence of the events that he describes in his narration and his recording of them as he writes: "É claro que as reflexões que aí deixo não foram feitas então, a caminho do seminário, mas agora no gabinete do Engenho Novo" (996). Textual evidences indicate gaps in his memory, such as when he describes his plans to commit suicide: "Leitor, houve aqui um gesto que eu não descrevo por havê-lo inteiramente esquecido, mas crê que foi belo e trágico" (1035). Dom Casmurro seems to

be under the impression that he is filling in a lacuna by providing additional information—whether or not he knew the statement to be true—but he is, in actuality, *creating* a lacuna. He admits to having “inteiramente esquecido,” which tells the readers that they must fill in the rest. Dom Casmurro’s attempts to fill in the gaps in his narration are a dog whistle conversation between Machado and his readers, a signal that readers can insert their own perspectives. This process of filling in the missing center is the picture of co-creative process, as the text provides the structure with which the reader can interact freely.

Machado also directly invites his readers to co-create both the text and their experience with it. Take, for example, Dom Casmurro’s comment in the final paragraph of Chapter II, “Eia, comecemos a evocação por uma célebre tarde...” (907). Machado carefully encodes these directions by working through the blind spots of the narrator to place them in plain sight for the readers. Here, it becomes essential to differentiate the voice of the author from the voice of the narrator. While Tosta argues that, “[Machado] às vezes parece não respeitar a individualidade da experiência do leitor, mas sim, tentar impor o seu ritmo a este” (9), the careful separation of these voices through a co-creative perspective reveals an alternate interpretation. The theory of co-creation suggests that Machado is, in fact, intentionally providing space for readers to co-create within the text in a deeply individual manner, which he does by utilizing a narrator who does not respect their individual experiences. Dom Casmurro may speak as if inviting readers to follow along on his guided tour, but Machado and his experienced readers know that the true invitation is one to co-create the entire text.

Machado works through Dom Casmurro’s sense of self-pity to create an opening for readers that communicates the need for co-creation, not only in that moment, but throughout the entire narration. As Dom Casmurro sets the stage for his narrative, he states, “Falto eu mesmo, e

essa lacuna é tudo” (907). To Dom Casmurro, this statement serves primarily as a nod to his pitiable state. He has lost everything, even his own self, and readers will soon learn of the source of his sadness, as well as the justifications of his actions that led to this state. To the active and co-creative reader, however, this phrase demonstrates that a central piece of the text to follow—the narrator and primary character—is *himself a lacuna*. As such, we can consider nothing in the novel as complete. Machado appears unconcerned with the final creation of the text as he readily turns the narration in its entirety over to readers to re-evaluate and re-create the text. The novel readers hold in their hands is not a final product; rather, *Dom Casmurro* is a draft intended to provide powerful and individual reader experiences as each reader works and reworks through the complexities contained therein.

Conclusion

Machado de Assis’ novel *Dom Casmurro* provides a powerfully crafted experience in which he supports and encourages us, his readers, to achieve the “optimal experience” while engaging with the text by responding to invitations to co-create. Through scaffolding, Machado presents us with opportunities to strengthen our active reading skills, which consequently prepare us to meet these increasingly difficult textual challenges. As such, Machado presents us with a prime opportunity to have the optimal experience of flow, as described by Csikszentmihalyi. Prepared to take on the challenge presented in the structure of the novel, Machado also presents us with both subtle and direct opportunities to participate in the creation of the novel itself. This co-creative experience provides us with a deep intellectual and emotional connection to the text, which then encourages us to engage with the text even further. The processes of both flow and co-creation are not straightforward and are not presented in a linear fashion in the novel. Rather,

they are iterative, just as is the process of creation itself. Through a narrational structure that invites, enables, and requires readers to profoundly engage with the text, Machado facilitates the co-creation of the text itself and, more importantly, the co-creation of each reader's journey to an extraordinary reading experience.