

Sexual Difference and Gender Dysphoria in Eça de Queirós's *O Primo Basílio* and *O crime do Padre Amaro*

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Abstract. In this study of *O Primo Basílio* and *O crime do Padre Amaro*, Mark Sabine reinvestigates Eça de Queirós's discussion of the upbringing, social role, and sexual behavior of Portuguese women in his first two Realist novels. Drawing on recent scholarship that has approached this subject from psychoanalytic- and revolutionary Marxist-feminist angles, it considers the novels in the context of the extensive medical, scientific and philosophical debates of the "woman question" that were precipitated in Great Britain by the publication of J. S. Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869). The article indicates echoes of Mill's ideas in Eça's critique of the upbringing of Portuguese daughters, and discusses how Eça's two novels present a subtle conception of gender not as an inherent biological characteristic but as a socially constructed, and multiple—rather than binary—identity system.

The thesis novels of Eça de Queirós have long been acknowledged as a high-water mark in nineteenth-century Portuguese prose fiction. Equally, however, they are a crucial source of evidence for the dissemination in Portugal of new ideas about the human constitution, and about the social roles and interactions of men and women in an increasingly industrialized, urban and literate society. This essay's subject is Eça's ambivalent engagement with contemporary arguments for women's emancipation, a project that had a complex and

uneasy relationship with the Portuguese liberal program for national “regeneration” that the novelist espoused. As Ana Paula Ferreira has emphasized, Eça’s depiction of middle-class women’s sexual transgressions reflects both a contemporary conception of the nation as a male-focused and male-ordered organism, and widespread anxiety regarding the future of this organism. His first two novels depict female adultery as intrinsic to a vicious cycle of social ills that, by imperilling individual women, also endangers the nation, by compromising women’s fulfilment of a patriotic duty of conceiving and rearing the new generation. Thus while blaming a complacent, hypocritical and misogynist establishment for the wretched physical, intellectual and moral condition of their heroines, they subordinate the cause of female self-realization to the patriotic imperative of healthy population growth (Ferreira 126-27). This article agrees with Ferreira about Eça’s overriding concern for a patriarchal model of national prosperity. It also, however, aims to illuminate the contradiction between this and Eça’s apparent endorsement of the profeminist side of an animated contemporary debate spanning the discourses of political philosophy, religion and the medical and social sciences. Eça is unusual among Portuguese nineteenth-century liberals, in appearing to reject contemporary presumptions of opposed male and female natures, and of the necessary desirability of strictly differentiated behavioral ideals for men and women. Participating in a conventional desire to cultivate a virile nation, Eça makes the far less conventional recommendation of more “masculine” behavior in women as well as men. He denounces as artificial and degenerate the paradigm of ladylike behavior currently prized in Portugal—warning that Portuguese daughters were passing their own cultivated ignorance and fragility on to their children of both sexes—and extols the contrasting “masculine” habits of contemporary English women. Eça’s urging of a universal cultivation of “virile” behavior, and his referencing of exemplary masculinity to Utilitarian values of practicality, industriousness, economy, reason and discipline, recall the ideas of the late J.S. Mill. The leading Utilitarian thinker of his time, Mill had called for the effacing of nearly all the apparent differences between the sexes, thereby contributing to mounting panic in many circles about a breakdown in sexual difference. Several of Mill’s arguments inform Eça’s message that the cultivation of an ideal female masculinity, far from threatening the nation with castration (Ferreira 130), can in fact defend against national emasculation.¹

Eça’s argument that conventional Portuguese femininity is an unnatural

affectation becomes evident when one compares the (gendered) upbringings, and the constitutions and fortunes, of his male and female characters: particularly the partially transgendered Padre Amaro and his lover Amélia. Eça's critique of the moral and physical degeneration of Portugal indicates a presumption of the natural, or ideal, similarity of men's and women's mental and physiological constitutions. Crucially, Eça—venturing into territory not explored by Mill—intimates that women's experience of sexual desire is inherently similar to men's. The suppression of an allegedly natural sexual appetite—such as was demanded of women and clergy by Catholic doctrine—in individuals of either sex contributes to poor moral, physical and intellectual health.

In the background to Eça's discussion of female sexual transgression and of gendered behavioral ideals is the transideological consolidation, over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, of a conception of male and female "natures" as complementary opposites. This displaced the assumption, central to Galenic medical science and galvanized by mainstream Christian teachings up until at least the late middle ages, that woman was at best an inferior and derivative form of man. Within Catholic doctrine, the new, oppositional model of sexual difference derived its impetus and its elaboration of a revised female ideal from the cult of the Immaculate Conception, formally endorsed by the papacy in 1854.² This new "Catholic model" asserted women's consummate—or even superior—virtue, their chaste, pious and conciliatory nature, and their crucial role as moral guardians and educators of children. Meanwhile, many Enlightenment thinkers—notably Rousseau—identified a similar dichotomy of the male constitution, which was seen as amenable to cultural advancement, and the female, which was seen as lacking the dynamism necessary to transcend a state of nature.³ As Diana H. Coole has shown, both Rousseau's theory of the "contractual" origins of human society, and his proposal of an educational model conducive to an ideal, egalitarian "social contract," present women's capacity for cultivating reason as strictly limited. Rousseau claims that the only basis of a natural society is the nuclear family in which the mother assumes a domestic role subservient to the father.⁴ A woman is thus harnessed within a conjugal contract that demands that she preserve a right to her husband's affection and protection. This she must attempt by cultivating chastity and her "natural" attributes of affection, compassion, guile and beauty. According to Rousseau, in modern society, the family constitutes a safe haven for "natural" feminin-

ity, out of which women stray at their own and society's peril. Lacking "the right sort of reason, autonomy, judgement, sense of justice and ability to consent" (Coole 112), Rousseau's women can only imperil, not contribute to, a man-made dominion of reason and civilization: her unchanging nature would either sicken or run amok in a modern world (Coole 117).

This trans-ideological establishment of a new sexual dichotomy attests to male thinkers' efforts to reconceptualize the category of "woman" at a time when industrialization, and its demand for a larger healthy and well-disciplined working population, were driving a re-evaluation of women's socio-economic significance. In the late nineteenth-century European novel, variations on the theme of female nature as complementary opposite of the male relate to attempts to co-opt the loyalties and energy of women for diverse and often opposed ideological agendas. In the constitutional monarchies of Catholic South-Western Europe, the concept of "woman" emerges as a battleground contested by the vested interests of (male) conservatives and liberals who presumed to guide and protect this precious but supposedly fragile social resource. If, as Michaela di Giorgio has noted, the Catholic Church was quick to direct women's energies to combat the growth of apostasy and anti-clericalism, this often lent further urgency, within liberal circles, to prescriptions of women's confinement to the domestic sphere, under their husbands' close scrutiny.⁵ From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, liberal thinkers drew on innovations in biology and medicine, and in particular on theories of evolution and psychology in their assertion of natural laws dictating women's social position.⁶ In the debate that arose amongst scientists, physicians, and liberal and feminist thinkers regarding sexual equality and/or difference, many—including Eça—concurred in refuting one crucial tenet of the new Catholic model of female virtue, namely the notion of a "naturally" low female sex drive.⁷ They expressed concern that while the Church denied the existence of a natural female libido, it was responsible for channelling women's sexual desires away from conceiving and succoring a future generation, and into a false and dangerously irrational religious fervor.

Eça's critique of the socialization of Portuguese women and of its consequences for the nation's future can be traced back from *O Primo Basílio* (1878) and the third published version of *O crime do Padre Amaro* (1880) to two essays published in Ramalho Ortigão's *Farpas* series in 1872.⁸ Eça's attack on Romantic sensibilities in these essays has been cited as evidence of their modelling on Proudhon's misogynistic *De la justice dans la révolution et dans l'église*

(Coleman 95-97). However, Eça's focus on the mis-education of daughters and his demand that practicality and respect take the place of passion as the foundation of matrimony align his critique equally well with those preoccupations of Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) to which Mill gave a Utilitarian makeover in *The Subjection of Women* (1869). Asserting that the strongest formative influence on a child is that of its mother (*Campanha* 133), Eça deplores middle-class Portuguese women's confinement to a "mundo de sentimento" (171) and their resulting "vaidade" (149). In tandem with sentimental values, the cult of fashion stimulates vanity, idleness and the neglect of physical health (139-44), while the demands of decorum preclude the habit of physical exercise and good deportment (136-38) and the development of a healthy appetite (138-39). Eça's implicit conclusion is that women can only fulfil the social responsibility that he allots them—of generating a progressive, manly nation—through enhanced opportunities for their own intellectual, moral, practical, and physical education. Eça's appeal here to Utilitarian principles has been remarked by Alan Freeland. This appeal moves more squarely onto the terrain occupied by Mill's *Subjection* when Eça emphasizes the loss to society of middle-class women's contribution that derives from their exclusion from "a vida pública, da indústria, do comércio, da literatura, de quase tudo" and confinement to an impractical "pequeno mundo, ou seu elemento—a família e a *toilette*" (*Campanha* 155-56).

Eça's analysis of the root of the problem recalls Mill's assertion that "the object of being attractive to men ... [has] become the pole star of feminine education and formation of character" (131). Meanwhile, Eça's catalogue of the consequent feminine "vaidade," and his assertion that "as mulheres mais ocupadas são as virtuosas" (*Campanha* 281) brings to mind Mill's calls for women to have free access to useful employment, and his assertion that many of the weaknesses identified in women derive from the simple "overflow of nervous energy run to waste" (Mill 174).⁹ Eça's analysis evinces less sympathy than Mill's for women themselves, and more concern for the well-being of husband, child and nation. When one examines how the essays' arguments are developed in Eça's two novels, however, clearer echoes of Mill's arguments against the current upbringing of daughters can be discerned: the first of these is an implicit critique of the cultivation of "exaggerated self-abnegation" (Mill 156) in daughters and wives maintained "in a chronic state of bribery and intimidation combined" (126). In *O Primo Basílio*, Luísa's servile response to the unreasoned commands and threats first of her husband and

later Basílio (e.g. 220-23) is connected to a lack of belief in her own existence independent of the men in her life. Luísa's feelings for her husband—to whom she has never felt a strong spontaneous attraction (*Primo Basílio* 22)—manifest themselves in her “curiosidade constante da sua pessoa e das suas coisas, ... o cabelo, ... a roupa, ... as pistolas, ... os papéis” (*Primo Basílio* 23). This fascination with the materiality of her husband and his possessions suggests an inability to assert a sense of purpose and identity except by reference to them: Jorge “era o *seu tudo*—a sua força, o seu fim, o seu destino, a sua religião, o seu homem!” (ibid.). Here, and later when Luísa submits to the will of Basílio, and to the conflicting identities that he, Jorge, Sebastião and Leopoldinha impose on her in turn, her story recalls a Millian argument against women's exclusion from civic affairs. Women's allegedly “greater liability to moral bias” results, Mill claims, from their being educated to feel “that the individuals connected with them are the only ones to whom they bear any duty” (191). In *O crime do Padre Amaro*, meanwhile, although the robust country girl Amélia is spared the childhood of pampered, cloistered decorum that weakens city-dweller Luísa's physical health, from early childhood she too is “left [a stranger] even to the elementary ideas [...] presupposed in any intelligent regard for larger interests or higher moral objects” (Mill 192). Her education is restricted to catechism and scripture, piano lessons and basic arithmetic (*O crime* 76-80) and to fanciful stories of lovesick nuns (an ironic counterpoint to the tragedy of the daughter of her piano teacher, Tio Cegonha's, seduced by a soldier and coerced into the sex trade (77)). Thanks to the volatile mixture of texts, from opera scores to devotional poetry, that nurture Amélia's romantic delusions, she comes to view religious observance in the terms of a Donizetti melodrama, and figures of religious authority as either romantic partners or as vengeful fathers: “Deus aparecia-lhe como um ser que só sabe dar o sofrimento e a morte e que é necessário abrandar” (ibid.). This initiation into a system of interactions with men based on the currency of intimidation and bribery is illustrated, moreover, by the presumptions of feminine sentimentality and guile to which she is exposed and encouraged to respond.¹⁰ Amélia's “liability to moral bias” and “excessive self-abnegation” will subsequently manifest themselves respectively in response to the blandishments and threats of the unscrupulous Amaro.

The more significant connection of both the essays and particularly of the novels with Mill's treatment of the “women question,” however, relates to Mill's rejection of arguments about the “natural” intellectual and psycholog-

ical characteristics of men and women (136-43), "a subject on which it is impossible in the present state of society to obtain complete and correct knowledge" (138). Eça's *Farpas* essays make one inconclusive allusion to "a organização do cérebro" of men or women (*Campanha* 160), and also one to the influence of "organismo" relative to "educação" (269). However the essays display a preference for a circumscribed use of the term "natureza" in describing sexed character. When employed in the essays to denote the character of an individual, sex, or race, "natureza" is consistently referenced to cultural and environmental influences.¹¹ In the novels, a similar use of the word (and an absence of references to sexed "organismo") suggests Eça is responding to Mill's demand for a less questionably empirical approach to female psychology, and recognition of the "eminently artificial character of what is referred to as women's 'nature'" (136). What is more, Eça signals his preference for the cultivation of a more "masculine" character in women as well as men. In "As meninas da geração nova em Lisboa," Eça holds up, as an example of the benefits of a reformed education for women, the model of the robust and independent *inglesa*. Eça extols, like a love-sick boarding school girl, the "sólido vigor ... juízo forte, consciência recta, [e] sentir puro" that the contemporary British woman derives from her habits of "o largo passeio, bem marchado ... todo de higiene," and "sérias leituras da ciência ... doce ciência para espíritos delicados que amam a vida e os seres" (*Campanha* 163). He compliments the two English women he encountered in Jerusalem who exemplify many of the attitudes and the masculine accomplishments of the so-called "New Woman" (147-48). Eça asserts that the chaste habits or "delicadeza" of these "amazonas" are absolutely of a piece with the "força" that equips them effectively to wield the whips and revolvers that they carry to defend their caravan against desert bandits (*ibid.*). Here more than anywhere else in the essays, Eça approaches Mill's claim that upbringing explains "nearly all the apparent differences between men and women." Eça's singling out of the "virilidade de pensamentos" of the modern *inglesa*, meanwhile, updates to contemporary scientific and philosophical theory Mary Wollstonecraft's plea that women "may every day grow more and more masculine" through "the imitation of manly virtues" (80).¹²

In Eça's novels, the same use of the term "natureza" is especially prominent in the only substantial featured account of a boy's upbringing: the disastrously "feminizing" childhood of Amaro.¹³ Losing his father at age five and his mother at six, and raised in the home of a devout widowed marchioness

until thirteen, Amaro's only male role-models are the priests entertained by his step-mother. These men exhibit the same character flaws that Eça attributes to Portuguese women: indolence, gluttony, an excessive concern for personal grooming and a fondness for gossip (*O crime* 37-38). Until he enters the seminary, Amaro's education is predominantly that which the essay on women's upbringing denounces: "livros beatos e doces," Chateaubriand and stories of female saints (35), and his lifestyle is sedentary, indulgent and cloistered. Accordingly, he comes to possess all the traits Eça attributed to Lisbon's young women in his 1872 essays: poor health, lack of initiative, laziness, and irrational fears. A degenerate "effeminacy" also marks his moral character: the attentions of the household maids, who "feminizavam-no ... [e] vestiam-no de mulher," make him "enredador [e] muito mentiroso" (35-36). In line with the argument of the *Farpas* essays, it is these formative influences, and not biological inheritance, that determine that at age fifteen, Amaro possesses what is variously described as a "natureza passiva, fácilmente dominável" (37), a "natureza afeminada" (39) and "incaracterística" (41).

Amaro's story is but one element in a pattern followed across both novels that more fully articulates Eça's thinking on the cultural construction of masculine and feminine "naturezas." This pattern places Eça closer to Mill's affirmation of "the extraordinary susceptibility of human nature to external influences" (137) than to Rousseau's, Proudhon's and Darwin's various identifications of sexually differentiated predispositions. However, Eça's analysis also foregrounds a phenomenon, frequently identified as both psychic motor and evidence of inherent sexual difference, to which Mill's *Subjection* makes little explicit reference: the libido. Eça sketches his characters' sexual histories in a manner that demonstrates that the character flaws developed by a "feminine" upbringing thwart the subject's attempts to control her, or his, sexual urges. Further to this—and again in a manner without parallel in Mill's treatment of gendered socialization—Eça presents the suppression of sexual desire as physically and psychologically damaging. Rather, for most individuals, the expression, even by illicit or transgressive means, of inherent sexual urges is preferable to enforced celibacy. And far from depicting heightened sexual appetite in women as either monstrous or even simply inherently disruptive, Eça presents women's experience of sexual desire as inherently similar to men's. Indeed, the devastating consequences of his women's sexual agency are shown to derive in part from a simple sexist double standard regarding the almost ubiquitous infraction of moral strictures governing sexual behavior. As

will be discussed, Eça's novels may expose this double standard, but ultimately they fail to challenge it.

In *O crime do Padre Amaro*, the account of Amaro's sexual awakening (ch. 3) initiates a series of warnings that eschewing carnal desires, and attempting to sublimate from passion a love of the godhead, will rebound spectacularly. Eça's subtly counterposed male and female case studies show how repressed desire for the human only returns projected onto corporeal representations of divinity. Amaro, entreated to "vencer a natureza" and to revile woman as the "Caminho de Iniquidades" (*O crime* 42), diverts his sexual and emotional craving towards the one image of woman that the (highly conservative) doctrine of the seminary does not demonize. Amaro's sexual fixation with images of the Virgin's body, which first manifests when he mentally undresses the lithograph image of the Immaculate Conception in his cell, resurfaces most spectacularly when he pressurizes Amélia into having sex while wearing a cape intended for a statue of the Virgin (343-46). This blasphemous objectification of a divine being has clear parallels with the sexual desires attributed to at least two celibate female characters. In a neat echo of Amaro's undressing of the Immaculate Conception, spinster Josefa Dias's confession to Abade Ferrão reveals that her devotions to St. Francis Xavier frequently end with her fantasizing about "como seria S. Francisco Xavier nu em pêlo" (410). While this peccadillo is treated humorously, a second echo is heard in the novel's tragic main plot, as Amélia's lifelong tendency to fetishize the trappings of religious authority (e.g. 127) is projected onto Amaro. This is exemplified when she ascends into a clearly sexual "êxtase baboso" at the sight of Amaro imparting the blessing during mass, "como se ele fosse o próprio Deus a cuja benção as cabeças se curvavam ao comprido da Sé" (146).

A similar case of paralleled sexual fixations arising from suppressed desire is presented by the paralysed and apparently mentally handicapped teenager Totó. Motherless, consumptive, bedridden and lonely, diagnosed by her priest as "possessed," and by Dr. Gouveia as hysterical, Totó's frustrated sexuality is first suggested when her father informs Amaro that she becomes passionately obsessed with her dolls (319). The contribution of sexual frustration to Totó's mental and physical decline and death is spelt out more clearly, however, when her passion for Amaro overthrows that for "as bonecas que agora desprezava" (330). When Amaro and Amélia use charitable visits to Totó as a pretext for illicit sex in the attic above her room, Totó's ardor is both fed and frustrated by awareness of what her visitors are up to (331; 341). The

evidence of sexual frustration as a factor in Totó's descent into a mortal illness attended by all the indicators of hysteria—"choro histórico" succeeded by paralysis, a "mudez obstinada e rancorosa" and "loucura furiosa"—forms more than just an ironic counterpoint to Amaro's own, more short-lived frustration. It also recalls the nervous illness that Amélia suffers as her unsatisfied lust for Amaro mounts—she has "sonhos lúbricos," and her waking hours are troubled by "uma inquietação de ciúmes, com melancolias lúgubres" as her "génio azedava-se" (145)—and, more intriguingly, the consequence of the teenage Amaro's attempts to suppress his sexual desires and focus on the theological studies and vocation for which his "natureza efeminada" makes him so unsuitable. Amaro "[e]magrecia, tinha suores hécticos: e mesmo no último ano [...] entrou na enfermaria com uma febre nervosa" (43-44).¹⁴

These parallels demonstrate the idea that a high female sex drive must be accepted as natural, and that sexual desire is not inherently distinct in males and females. This is also intimated by the sympathetic assessment of the sexual woman's plight offered by Abade de Ferrão and Doutor Gouveia, the two characters who stand out as well-intentioned and fair-minded amid a cast of reactionary and self-interested clerics, and variously egotistical, unscrupulous, and fanatical liberals. The saintly yet ultra-conservative Ferrão, and Gouveia, an avuncular positivist whose anti-clericism is informed by his pantheist and Darwinist convictions, secretly aid and advise Amélia following her impregnation by Amaro. While asserting belief in wholly different relationships between sexuality and moral and physical good health, both men identify Amélia's sexuality as natural and irrepressible. The Abade (following a doctrine about women's inherent "malícia" made obsolete by Pius's 1854 bull) concludes that "a pobre Amèliazita tinha a carne muito bonita e muito fraca; ... era toda mulher—toda mulher devia ficar; limitar-lhe a acção era estragar-lhe a vitalidade" (437). His concern for Amélia is thus a triumph of charitable instincts over doctrinal misogyny: even if the corrupt flesh of a daughter of Eve cannot be reconciled to godliness, Amélia "vitalidade" depends on the accommodation of her inherent sexual urges. Gouveia, meanwhile, asserts a post-Darwinian line that "a natureza manda conceber, não manda casar. O casamento é uma fórmula administrativa" (433-34). Gouveia is the most credible intellectual authority in either of Eça's first two novels. It is notable, however, that he is not absolutely vindicated by the plot. In his theological debate with Ferrão in chapter twenty-three Gouveia is rather afforded the benefit of the doubt, called away to attend to Amélia before Ferrão can

respond to his final sally (471). Also, his scientific and medical knowledge is not without its weak spots: Dionísia, an experienced midwife, correctly deplores his fatal decision to bleed Amélia in her post-natal illness (473-74).

One theory of an inherent biological determination of the libido that is advanced less problematically in *O crime do Padre Amaro*, meanwhile, makes no significant distinction between male and female constitutions. This is the theory, deriving from Galen and still entertained in the nineteenth-century science of phrenology, of the “four temperaments.” The narrator notes the different “vícios” in which the “sangíneos” and “linfáticos” amongst Amaro’s peers in the seminary indulge, and suggests that both Amaro’s mother—“uma mulher forte, de sobranceiras cerradas, a boca larga e sensualmente fendida, e uma cor ardente” (34)—and his father—who dies of apoplexy (ibid.)—were of the sanguine temperament, and thus susceptible to powerful sexual urges. Similarly, Amélia’s illness during puberty—“uma grande febre” and “sonhos espessos” followed by “vertigens e ... enjoos”—is interpreted by Gouveia as indicating that “[e]sta rapariga tem o sangue vivo e há-de ter as paixões fortes” (81-82). The counterposition of mother and father, and Amélia and Amaro, in Eça’s use of the trope of sanguine temperament provides one further riposte to both Rousseau’s claim that women contend with an inherently greater nature-culture conflict than do men, and to Darwin’s claim that their capacity for mediating the urges of nature and the aspirations of civilization is lesser than men’s. The subject of Darwinist allusions in Eça’s work demands a more thorough study than this article can offer. However, the flaws in Gouveia’s wisdom, and the still less authoritative ventriloquizing of Darwin’s more sexist notions by Julião in *O Primo Basílio*, are not the only intimations that Eça harbored doubts regarding the Darwinian position on sexual difference. Indeed, both his first two novels present contemporary Portuguese society as confounding Darwin’s belief that, among humans, evolutionary progress through natural selection applied uniquely to men, who competed to select women purely on the grounds of the latter’s physical beauty (Rowold xxii). In Eça’s novels, it is the heroines who, with flagrant disregard for their material prospects or for the perpetuation of their line, select their sexual partners on the basis of male beauty. This topos could of course be related to a “degenerationist” thesis that Portuguese social conventions ensure the decadence of the community by promoting an “unnatural selection” according to inappropriate criteria. However, Eça’s clearly indicated solution to such degeneracy remains a reform of both male *and female* education and habits. This would place Eça closer to those who embraced calls for social reforms that

would permit women to evolve freely, and who rejected Darwin's belief that women had been "naturally" removed from the struggle for existence by benevolent male domination, and that they had thus "naturally" ceased to evolve.

O Primo Basílio incorporates reflections on the female struggle for existence into its own assertions that sexual differences are minor, and that sexual deprivation results in vice, moral perversion and poor health, through similar parallel representations of male and female characters. The Carvalhos' housemaid Juliana's bitter, spiteful character is presented as a moral perversion caused in part by the sexual and emotional rejection she suffers (*Primo Basílio* 78), and her consequent suppression of her sexual fantasies:

Não contou mais com os homens, por despeito, por desconfiança de si mesma. As rebeliões de natureza, sufocava-as; eram fogachos, flatos. Passavam. Mas faziam-na mais seca; e a falta daquela grande consolação agradava a miséria da sua vida. (80)

The reference to "fogachos, flatos" that Juliana "sufocava" links her suppression of desire to the mounting ill-health—heart palpitations, digestive disorders, and nervous tics—that she suffers. All of this contrasts starkly with the vigor and cheer of the household's other servant, the sexually energetic Joana, a "rapariga muito forte, com peitos de ama" (60). Meanwhile the lack of erotic "consolação" increases Juliana's bitterness ("faziam-na mais seca") and also leads to the substitution of an abnormal alimentary appetite for an inherent sexual appetite. Juliana becomes "muito gulosa" and she "[n]utria o desejo de comer bem" (79) by constant pilfering from the larder. Significantly, this is not Eça's only recourse to the well-worn literary topos of hunger and gluttony signifying unsatisfied erotic yearning. In *O crime do Padre Amaro*, following Amélia's confinement in Ricoça, Amaro attempts to assuage his melancholy by writing poetry but, finding himself possessed of little more than "a seca prosa do temperamento carnal," consoles himself by satisfying an "apetite tremendo" with sumptuous repasts (*O crime* 402-03). A more precise male counterpart to Juliana, her sexual frustrations and moral turpitude can, however, be found within *O Primo Basílio* itself: the peevish Julião. Julião too is "seco e nervoso" (*Primo Basílio* 35). Forever "pobre, com dívidas," in a similar way to Juliana he becomes "despeitado e amargo," and consumed with envy for his relative Jorge, "um <<mediocre>>, que vivia confortavelmente, bem casado, com carne contente" (ibid.). He longs for—amongst other luxuries—a "mulher loura com dote," and "[t]inha a certeza

do seu direito a [esta felicidade]" (36).

The comparison of the cases of Julião and Juliana indicates that, just as men enjoy professional and educational opportunities that are denied to women like Juliana, so too they escape with greater ease both sexual deprivation and society's strictures on sexual activity, while also preserving their physical and moral health. Julião's sub-Darwinian pronouncements at Acácio's dinner party that "[o] casamento é uma fórmula administrativa, que há de um dia acabar," and that "a fêmea era um ente subalterno; o homem deveria aproximar-se dela em certas épocas do ano ... fecundá-la, e afastar-se com tédio," (337) indicate that he endorses a principle of placing women's bodies at the disposal of men by whichever means the latter find most expedient. While there is no clear indication that Julião resorts to the services of prostitutes to sate his animal lusts (and with his scrawny frame, greasy hair and dandruff, Julião lacks the vigorous health of Eça's most sexually satisfied characters), many of Eça's unmarried men do enjoy discreet arrangements with concubines and prostitutes. These liaisons attract little clear narrative censure, and the arrangement and conclusions of the novels' diegeses mete out no symbolic punishment for them. In *O Primo Basílio*, Julião's discovery of Acácio's ménage with his housemaid is presented as just one more example of the *Conselheiro's* pompous hypocrisy (329-31). Meanwhile, in the final chapter of *O crime do Padre Amaro*, Cônego Dias appears to be continuing his long-standing affair with Amélia's widowed mother, "a S. Joaneira," and a brothel flourishes in the heart of Leiria, run by Amaro's former housekeeper and go-between, Dionísia (495-96). Such illicit sexual liaisons rarely, if ever, threaten to destroy Eça's male characters: not even in the case of the homosexual Libaninho, apprehended—to the scandalized amusement of both Dias and Amaro—with a sergeant "de tal modo que não havia a duvidar ... às dez horas da noite, na Alameda!" (495). Indeed, in Amaro's own case, regular sexual exercise, however illicit, twice contributes to the restitution of good health. After his bout of nervous illness at the seminary, Amaro recovers vitality and physical virility at his first posting in Feirão. On his subsequent move to Leiria, Amaro responds to Dias's observation that he appears "mais forte, mais viril" with the explanation that "o ar da serra ... fez-me bem" (29). In the following chapter, however, the narrator candidly attributes Amaro's "estado de espírito muito repousado" to "as satisfações que lhe dera em Feirão uma grossa pastora" (48). Any ambiguity about the precise nature of these "satisfações" should be dispelled by the information that they calmed Amaro's

earlier “exaltações, que no seminário lhe causava a continência” (ibid.).¹⁵ The key role played by sexual activity in correcting Amaro’s sickly and “effeminate” physiology is intimated again in the final chapter, when Dias meets Amaro in Lisbon and remarks that “está mais forte. Fez-lhe bem a mudança.” This second improvement in Amaro’s health comes despite the claustrophobia and poor hygiene of the city; the only detail that is divulged about the comforts that Amaro enjoys in Lisbon, however, is that now, to avoid the crisis provoked by his philandering in Leiria, he only confesses married women (497).

Notwithstanding its benefits to Amaro’s health, this unpunished serial impregnation of *beatas* is crucial to Eça’s warning that contemporary ills are endangering the nation’s future. Amaro transmits his “natureza efeminada” like a virus, by siring, on women left ill-prepared for motherhood, a new generation of effete, irrational and unprincipled bastards. Yet this state of affairs is nowhere blamed on Amaro’s hyperactive libido *per se*, but on the poor upbringing that leaves both Amaro and his paramours lacking moral sense and self-control, and on the corrupt system of patronage operated by both clerical and secular elites. A third factor that Eça blames for adultery (and thus, indirectly, for national degeneration) is indicated by Dias’s hearty laughter at Amaro’s admission that he has learnt to avoid impregnating unmarried women. This factor, according to “O problema do adultério,” is the attribution, by men in general, of masculine accomplishment and prestige to the serial seducer—“o celibatário, o *dandy*, o *leão*” (285-91).¹⁶ The prevalence of precisely this attitude, and of men’s corresponding indulgence in extra-marital affairs, is represented in *O Primo Basílio*, both in the lubricious macho banter at Conselheiro Acácio’s party, and when Jorge brags in a letter to Sebastião of his amorous conquests while away working in the Alentejo (275). Assuming the roles of a Faustian “*Dio del oro, Del mundo signor*” in his own home and a “Dom João do Alentejo” away from it (*Primo Basílio* 17; 275), Jorge shares his wife’s frequently remarked weakness for turning marriage and sexual relations into an opera, and demonstrates Eça’s admission that the “idealismo amoroso” and “extinção de fé conjugal” undermining contemporary matrimony (*Campanha* 264) relate to flawed ideals of bourgeois masculinity as well as of bourgeois femininity.

This concession, however, makes all the more incongruous the failure of Eça’s novels to offer middle-class women an alternative to the “fórmula administrativa” of marriage that Gouveia, for example, scorns but nevertheless advocates as the only solution to Amélia’s problems (*O crime* 145; 433).

Eça's depictions of spinsterhood corroborate the causal link between enforced celibacy and physical and moral degeneration. S. Joaneira's stands out among her never-married friends not just for being sexually active but also for her comparative good health and the demonstration of kind habits that mitigate her character flaws. Indeed, Eça's unkind treatment of spinsters constitutes an ideological own goal. He represents his *beatas* not as a socio-economic dead weight but as agents of a Church militant that emasculates Portugal by (mis)guiding young men into holy office (Amaro) or driving them to emigrate to escape authoritarian conservatism and its alleged correlative of economic stagnation (João Eduardo). Thus Eça draws attention to Portuguese bourgeois women's social influence, but, unlike Mill, will not conceive of any less pernicious employment for those who, in a nation continuously haemorrhaging economically productive males, were doomed to remain single.

For Eça, it would seem, the proposal of women's employment rights remained beyond the pale. This complicates, but does not vitiate, his presentation of the argument that social degeneration resulted not from a failure to respect or control an "uncivilizable" female "nature," but from the imposition of degenerate models of gendered behavior on similar and malleable male and female minds. One final instance of this argument, and of the corollary indictment of the Portuguese failure to extend liberal and utilitarian principles into the domestic sphere, emerges improbably in the scandalous figure of Leopoldinha in *O Primo Basílio*. Leopoldinha is reviled by Lisbon society for her serial affairs with students and circus gymnasts, and her prostitution of herself to her husband's associates as a means of financing her pleasures. While ostracized by her peers and banished from Luísa's company by Jorge, Leopoldinha's treatment by her creator is contrastingly indulgent. Unlike her friend Luísa, Leopoldinha suffers no martyrdom in the novel's dénouement, and despite her routine of prostitution and fornication, she bears none of the bestial, racist, degenerate, or transsexual stigmata that characterize so many contemporary literary anti-heroines. A paragon of feminine beauty—inspiring an almost physical attraction in Luísa (26)—Leopoldinha argues lucidly to justify her lifestyle choices, and keeps a cooler head than does Luísa in a crisis or conflict (321-22). Like S. Joaneira, she stands out amid the female characters of the novel as both sexually active and uncommonly physically robust, slapping her chest to reassure Luísa that "isto é rijo, isto é são!" (165). Thus contradicting post-Darwinist diagnoses of degeneracy in the form of bestial evolutionary throwback or transsexual monstrosity, Leopoldinha, her

sexual peccadilloes and moral vacuity fit instead into a typology of socially-constructed gender paradigms. Her unusual name, while triggering a Naturalist allusion to a bestial atavism lurking in the human psyche, equally labels her as a transgendered female equivalent of such “leões” as Basílio. Her complaint that “eu nasci para homem” (167) is supported by her unladylike appetites for tobacco, alcohol and solid, savory food (164-68). Further to this, while still at school she honed her libertine habits, enjoying “beijos furtados” from her “sentimentos” or girlfriends—having as many as four on the go at a time (164-65). She tells Luísa that “nunca, depois de mulher” has she felt “por um homem o que senti pela Joaninha!” (165), suggesting her preference for a masculine lesbian sexual role. The indications are that Leopoldinha, raised to cultivate beauty, guile, passion and sentiment as the hallmarks of femininity, but unable to resign herself to a woman’s allotted social role, aspires to what Eça considers the wrong kind of masculine identity and pursuits. Her rejection of a feminine identity and destiny is however most apparent in her distaste for motherhood, but here again Leopoldinha embodies not a monstrous inversion of a natural femininity, but another tragically wasteful consequence of women’s miseducation and lack of social freedom or status. Leopoldinha rejects motherhood from the position of a woman married to a man who she claims has no enthusiasm for paternity or even matrimony.¹⁷ More importantly, though, the specific terms in which this rejection is couched address the issue of women’s social role precisely on Mill’s terms of including women in a political project of reconciling pleasure and utility: “[u]ma mulher com filhos está inútil para tudo, está atada de pés e mãos! Não há prazer na vida” (168). What Leopoldinha fails to understand is first that, while her own husband tolerates her adultery, it is the laws of marriage that render most bourgeois women “atada de pés e mãos.” If trapped, like Luísa, in a domestic “convento” or “prisão” (ibid.), Leopoldinha would direct her anger elsewhere than at maternity. At the same time, Leopoldinha’s allusion to the twin imperatives of utility and pleasure ironically indicate how Portuguese bourgeois women are systematically debarred from the useful activities in which—as Mill argues—the most elevated pleasures are to be found. Her bitter admission to Luísa that her pursuit of “paixões” is ultimately unsatisfying implies that an individual appraised of the satisfaction deriving from more noble intellectual and emotional activities can be expected to abandon vice:

Não te podem fazer feliz!

É claro que não! – exclamou a outra. – Mas... - Procurou a palavra; não a quis empregar decerto; disse apenas com um tom seco: – Divertem-me!

(*O Primo Basílio* 168)

Leopoldinha's choice of the word "divertir" possesses an ironic multiple meaning. Her erotic dalliances may keep her amused, but they are also a diversion in the sense that all the more agreeable and worthwhile paths in life have been closed to her by the shortcomings of her upbringing and the tyranny of sexist laws and conventions.

In conclusion, one must first admit that this article's arguments remain vulnerable to the sometimes ambivalent nature of the allusions to a range of current medical, sociological and philosophical positions that are triggered through Eça's exercise of what Carlos Reis has termed an "estética do pormenor." Advancing beyond this essay's speculations will require a comprehensive review of Eça's changing reflections on, and references to, post-Darwinist theories of evolution and biological determination over the course of the 1870s. In their discussion of the apparent differences between men and women, however, Eça's two novels repeatedly testify to the crucial role of education and gendered socialization, and assert no definitions of predetermined male or female "natures." Perceiving how questionable gender labels are attached as value indicators to intellectual and emotional characteristics and attitudes, Eça bases his program for social reform on a cross-examination of competing, and ideologically-constructed, ideals of men's and women's behavior. More remarkably, he suggests that the female masculinity typified by the British "amazon"—and indeed such forms of male femininity as that of "a donzela" Ferrão in *O crime do Padre Amaro*—are preferable to the degenerate norms of gendered behavior that he deplores in contemporary Portugal.¹⁸ This is particularly the case given that—as the abhorrent conduct of Amaro and Leopoldinha suggests—the blending of decadent masculine and feminine paradigms in the same individual is not an unknown phenomenon. While consciously or coincidentally adapting key elements of J.S. Mill's reformulation of Wollstonecraftian arguments for sexual equality, however, Eça does not take the liberal feminist program to its logical conclusion. Rather, support in principle for female liberty is subordinated to a stubborn belief that only the continued domestication of women under patriarchal authority would guarantee the immediate success of Portugal's biological regen-

eration. The ultimate objective of Eça's take on pseudo-Wollstonecraftian "generalized androcentrism" (Coole 153) is to achieve not the liberal ideal of universal freedom of opportunity but rather the useful and productive circulation of the (mostly female) sexual energy currently suppressed, perverted, diverted or squandered through (mostly male) mismanagement.

Diana H. Coole has noted that Mill's feminist arguments stem from a calculation that, in the demographic and economic conditions of mid nineteenth-century Britain, a surplus of procreative capacity permitted and indeed required the social and professional empowerment of women. Eça's engagement with the "women question" sought to address the admittedly very distinct socio-economic circumstances of 1870s Portugal. Nevertheless if Eça's reform program could not accommodate socially useful alternatives to maternity, one must ask what he imagined those Portuguese women who could never legally be a mother might aspire to be, other than another model for his gallery of unhappy and unproductive spinsters, adulteresses and hystericals.*

*A number of the arguments in this article were first presented in my MA thesis, "Female Nature and Destiny in *La Regenta*, *O Primo Basílio* and *O crime do Padre Amaro*" (unpublished, University of Manchester 1997). I am deeply grateful to Professor Hilary Owen both for her supervision of the initial research, and for her discussion with me of the ideas subsequently developed in the preparation of this article.

Notes

¹ On late nineteenth-century anxieties linking the elision of sexual difference with social degeneration, see Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy*.

² On the history of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, see Warner (236-54). For a full account of the reconceptualization of the category "woman" in nineteenth-century Catholic doctrine, see di Giorgio.

³ See Riley (1-17).

⁴ As Coole summarizes, Rousseau presents a wife's subservience to her husband first as fitting due to the male's greater strength and abilities and to the vulnerable and inactive state occasioned by childbirth (108). However, he also deems it necessary "because (due to the sexual division of labor) the father provides for the child, he must know it to be his own and so the woman's conduct must be carefully supervised" (ibid). As Coole points out, Rousseau is unable to identify the incentive for which formerly self-sufficient pre-social women would sacrifice their freedom to the institution of the patriarchal family (109).

⁵ See di Giorgio 184. Ferreira emphasizes the association, by Portuguese liberals and early Portuguese feminists alike, of "the phantom of an irrational, sensuous and degenerate femininity" with the "religious, anti-progressive, blind forces that marginalize[d] the national community" (125).

⁶ See Rowold (xvi) and Laqueur (194 + ff.).

⁷ Rowold notes that many evolutionists, such as Darwin, in *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871), and George Romanes, forcefully refuted the “natural equality of the sexes” (xviii). Meanwhile, “degeneration” theorists such as Maudsley blamed women’s social activity for various symptoms of social decay. While some contemporary feminist ripostes to this reiterated Mill’s dismissal of claims to an accurate knowledge of human nature and constitution, others, by scientists such as Elizabeth Garrett Anderson and Edith Simcox, argued that existing laws governing women’s behavior were holding back their “natural” evolutionary development (Rowold xxiii-xxiv; xxviii-xxix).

⁸ “As meninas de geração presente em Lisboa” and “O problema do adultério,” in Eça de Queiroz (*Campanha*, Vol. 2: 133-71, 257-91). On these essays’ relationship to Eça’s first two thesis novels, see Coleman, Ferreira, and Freeland.

⁹ As Rowold sets out, Mill’s assertion that women’s “nervous energy” is permitted inadequate channels of release counters the idea, later taken up by the social-Darwinist philosopher Herbert Spencer, that the human organism was “ruled by a fixed stock of vital energy,” which in women’s case was largely expended in meeting “the cost of reproduction” (xxv). This exhaustion of vital energy was held to account both for women’s lesser physical growth and for their lack of “the latest products of human evolution: the power of abstract reasoning and the sentiment of justice” (ibid.).

¹⁰ This is exemplified by Canon Dias’s response when the kindly-intentioned Amélia lies to him in order to secure some woollen stockings for Tio Cegonha: far from telling her off for dishonesty, Dias rewards her seductive display of affection and childish beauty (*O crime* 79). Cegonha for his part encourages in Amélia “o elemento feminino que amam os velhos, com as carícias, as suavidades de voz, as delicadezas de enfermeira” (80), and feeds her appetite for romance and for a spiritually vapid “aesthetic” Christianity, with his stories of clerical life in Évora (80-81).

¹¹ In “O problema do adultério,” Eça claims that when a woman is kept usefully employed with household management “sua natureza torna-se [...] hóstil à fantasia” (*Campanha* 282, my italics). The least unequivocal referencing of “natureza” to cultural and environmental factors in these essays is when Eça reiterates Hippolyte Taine’s commendation of the English “temperamento, publicidade, boas saudes, rectidão de idéias,” and adds to this list the quality of melancholy, “alguma coisa de vago, de saído de Ofélia, d’ossianesco, de exhalado da harpa de Erin, [que] ficou no fundo daquelas naturezas femininas dos países loiros” (ibid., my italics). While it is unclear whether Eça views this “melancholy” as a biological or cultural inheritance, he presents it as one constituent of a range of otherwise cultural and environmental influences shaping women’s “natureza.”

¹² Wollstonecraft’s “Author’s introduction” defends “masculine women” by explaining that “[if] by this appellation men mean to inveigh against [women’s] ardor in hunting, shooting, and gaming, I shall most cordially join in the cry; but if it be against the imitation of manly virtues, or, more properly speaking, the attainment of those talents and virtues, the exercise of which ennobles the human character, and which raises females in the scale of animal being, when they are comprehensively termed mankind, all those who view them with a philosophic eye must, I should think, wish with me, that they may every day grow more and more masculine” (80).

¹³ The word “natureza,” denoting individual character, occurs nine times in *O crime do Padre Amaro*. The adult Amaro’s “natureza” is “fraca” and “lassa.” Amélia is variously attributed a “natureza sensível,” “natureza lassa” and a “natureza de boa rapariga.” The one instance where the word is linked to (non-sex specific) biological inheritance is the reference to the “natureza comprimida” of the “infáticos” amongst Amaro’s peers in the seminary, as discussed later in this essay.

¹⁴ Eça’s implication that frustrated sexual desire provokes nervous illness is an intriguing deviation from the influential theory that neurasthenia (the condition of nervous exhaustion often considered responsible for symptoms of “hysteria”) was caused by mismanagement of the

body's finite store of nervous energy, as for example through the excessive use of one particular organ in the body (see Rowold xxv and Russett 113-15). His novel suggests that it is rather the lack of use (or perhaps the onanistic misuse) of one organ that brings on the nervous disorder.

¹⁵ The thesis that sexual satisfaction explains Amaro's physical virilization at Feirão and thereafter is also supported by Bishop-Sánchez's observation that "the confessional and the act of listening substitute/constitute the direct access to the object of desire" that allow the confessor to "[release] built-up tensions" (72).

¹⁶ The prestige afforded the male libertine is evident in the depiction of what Bishop-Sánchez calls Amaro's "oscillating gender roles": the "dignified asexuality" expected of a cleric, which is undercut by his private anxiety about his "effeminacy," and the contrasting role of "sexualized, virile predator" that he assumes as confessor and lover (73). It is only through this "despotic" role that Amaro feels able to "avenge a lifetime existence of being dominated" (74).

¹⁷ Here, as in the case of Jorge's adultery, Eça's novel disdains to substantiate its hints at a husband's equal, or greater, crimes against matrimony, by literally shutting Leopoldinha's husband out of the narrative behind a slammed door (*Primo Basílio* 322).

¹⁸ The Abade de Ferrão's nickname, "a donzela," is given in tribute to his gentle, compassionate and conciliatory behavior, which *O crime do Padre Amaro's* narrator joins in extolling. Ferrão's is not the only case of male femininity in Eça's first two novels that receives narratorial blessing. Oliveira points out how during Luísa's fatal illness, Jorge assumes "uma série de atitudes tradicionalmente femininas," and a "feminine" occupation as Luísa's "enfermeiro" (98). As Oliveira argues, these feminine characteristics "representam para a figura [de Jorge] traços verdadeiramente redentores" (99).

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