

Under the Sign of Orientalism: Travel Comradeship in *A Relíquia* by Eça de Queirós

José das Candeias Sales
Universidade Aberta;
Centro de História da Universidade de Lisboa

«— *Então, ambos com o mesmo roteiro, podíamos acamaradar, Dr. Topsius! (...).*
— *Pois acamarademos, D. Raposo! Será uma deleitosa economia! (...)*
— *D. Raposo, nós temos sido bons amigos...» (...)*
— *Adeus, companheiro, adeus! (...) e beijámo-nos na face como dois irmãos.»*¹

Eça de Queirós, *A Relíquia*

The novel *A Relíquia* (*The Relic*) by Eça de Queirós (1845-1900) was published in *feuilleton* between April 24th and June 10th 1887, in Rio de Janeiro's newspaper *Gazeta de Notícias*, after a gestation which dates back, at the least, to 1880². The first version of the work, which would be published in volume in the same year of 1887, would be almost finished 5 years earlier, in late 1882, and was written

¹ Queirós 2004a. This edition will be used to guide us in all citations.

² The publication of his tales and novels in the Portuguese and Brazilian press was a literary and artistic practice to which Eça de Queirós gave particular attention deriving from the socio-cultural role played by the press itself (cf. Reis 1983, 7).

during the author's stay in Bristol, where he performed his duties as Portuguese consul. The second version would be finished in September 1884, already in Portugal. In June 1885, Eça would have been in London to document himself for his third version³.

The plot of *A Relíquia* focuses around Teodorico Raposo, the protagonist and narrator, who lived with an old, rich and very devout aunt. Influenced by a friend, he decides to approach the aunt with a scheme to inherit her wealthy fortune. As such, he pretends to be a religious devoted. He asks her aunt to finance a trip to Paris, but she refuses flatly stating that Paris was the city of vice and perdition. Teodorico asks, then, to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The aunt consents and asks him to bring her a souvenir. The nephew promises to bring a religious relic which would help to enhance her worship and spend her days in a much better way.

The hypocrite nephew travel to Egypt and Palestine, and during the trip takes an unholy and immoral life, engaging with an English woman (Miss Mary) in Alexandria, who offers him a package with her nightdress, to remembering him the moments they spent together. Before returning from the Orient, after a mystic dream, Teodorico remembers his aunt's request and with the branches of a bush weaves a crown, wrapped it and put it in his luggage. However, he passes by a woman beggar and gives her the package that he thought contained the nightdress.

Arriving in Lisbon, he reports hypocritically to his aunt all the penances and fasts suffered during his pilgrimage and offers her the package, saying it contained the Christ's crown of thorns. The opening of the supposed relic is made before a huge audience of priests and devout ladies in an atmosphere of anxiety. To the amazement of all, instead of a sacred object, came to light the nightdress of Teodorico's English lover. This unusual episode worth Teodorico the expulsion of his aunt's house and the loss of the fortune he craved.

³ Cf. Matos 1993, 829.

In order to survive, Raposo starts to sell relics from the Holy Land, which he manufactures in large quantities, but soon grasp the futility of falsehood and lie. Though, Teodorico recognizes that he lost her aunt's big buck fortune for not being even more hypocritical and cynical: if, in that day he had the courage to declare that the night-dress belonged to St. Mary Magdalene, he would be admired by all and would have inherited the fortune.

As it is recognized by Eça's scholars, we are before a work written in full maturity of the author, coming to light of day when one of his most famous novels, *Os Maias*, was already almost complete⁴. Nonetheless, *A Relíquia* does not generate sentiments of great appreciation among all critics and, apparently, on Eça de Queirós himself. Albeit he obviously did not reject it, he personally did not admire his «worthless book», as he wrote in a letter sent on July 2nd 1887 to his friend Luís de Magalhães:

«Eu por mim, salvo o respeito que lhe é devido, não admiro pessoalmente *A Relíquia*. A estrutura e composição do livreco são muito defeituosas. Aquele mundo antigo está ali como um trambolho, e só é antigo por fora, nas exterioridades, nas vestes e nos edifícios. (...). O único valor do livreco está no realismo fantasista da Farsa...»⁵

During these years, in late 19th century, literary critics have also left unflattering opinions about *A Relíquia*, some for the scarce and pathetic draw of characters or for the inconsistency and schematic

⁴ Cf. *id.*, *ibid.*, 829.

⁵ «For me, except for the respect it deserves, I don't personally admire *A Relíquia*. The worthless book's structure and composition are very defective. That ancient world lays there like an encumbrance, and is only ancient on the outside, in the exteriorities, in the garments and in the buildings. (...). The only value of the worthless book is in the fanciful realism of the Farce». *Apud* Matos 1993, 829. This letter written by Eça de Queirós, where he assumes and emphasizes the flaws of his prose, in an enormous exercise of literary self-conscience, served to moderate Luís de Magalhães' enthusiasm who had published in the journal *A Província* a torn critic to the novel (cf. Reis 1983: 13). It should be noticed that Eça had applied with *A Relíquia* for the D. Luís prize of the Royal Academy of Sciences (Lisbon), loosing in favour of Henrique Lopes de Mendonça, who presented the work *O Duque de Viseu* (*The Duke of Viseu*): cf. Matos 1993, 24 e 830.

repetition of the their psychological types (immoral, mediocre, incomplete, empty); others due to the unlikelihood of the mystic dream of Teodorico Raposo, however beautiful, gracious or lyrical purporting it could be; or simply because it was a boring, inconsistent, extravagant and inconceivable book. Some even do not hesitate to classify the work as simply as a «thwarted experience» (João Gaspar Simões)⁶.

It is unquestionable that it is a book written in the first person (autodiegetic, omniscient and whose narrator had a «testimonial nature»⁷), by a mediocre and relatively ignorant character, full of schemes and subterfuges of conduct, where predominates the style of pure farce and of unrealistic invention. The social satire in this markedly autobiographic narrative rejects sanctimoniousness and hypocrisy in general.

By framing *A Relíquia* of Eça de Queirós as an object of literary production, we need to consider the excessive force of attraction, almost uncontrollable, that the Orient in general, and Egypt in particular, wielded over the European literate world of the 1800's. After the Napoleonic campaign into Egypt (1798–1801), the «Orient temptation» hit it in such a way that «erudite tourism» converted into a cultural bath mandatory to European writers, painters, literates and intellectuals. Orientalism presented itself as a new Humanism, a new Renaissance («Oriental Renaissance»). The primitive cradle of civilizations resurged filled with colour, mystery and fascination. The Orient became a kind of «subjective homeland»⁸, «a mythic and real permanent reference»⁹, «an historically mythic and real Orient»¹⁰.

Orient and Orientalism were furiously in fashion leaving its impressions in the 1800's Western Europe, in the «travels to the Orient» and in their artistic productions, in the most varied fields of

⁶ See the appreciations about *A Relíquia* that A. Campos Matos mentions from Pinheiro Chagas, Camilo Castelo Branco, Oliveira Martins, João Gaspar Simões, Álvaro Lino, João Maria Bello, Valéry Larbaud, Machado Rosa, Guerra da Cal e Beatriz Berrin (cf. Matos 1993: 830-832).

⁷ Reis 1984, 179, 180, 194, 200, 203; Reis 1996, 396.

⁸ Cf. Lima 1993a, 431.

⁹ Lima 1995.

¹⁰ *Id.*

expression (from music to furniture, passing through architecture, decoration, painting, illustration, literature and historical narrative).

Eça de Queirós, in the path of many other European scholars (e.g., Gustave Flaubert, Maxime Du Camp, Théophile Gautier, Chateaubriand, Vivian Denon, Jean-François Champollion, Gérard Nerval, Edmond About, etc.), also made, from October 1869 to January 1870, the Oriental route and, like many others, left about it abundant reminiscences in his productions¹¹.

In this approach, the main attention will focus on the literary features of Teodorico Raposo, the main character in *A Relíquia*. He is genuine and exclusively concerned about women and to live a snugly life that his maternal aunt's substantial inheritance was going to provide him as her only heir. By this, or through this, we intend to undertake a journey along his contacts and «friends» during his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, particularly with his main interlocutor in *A Relíquia*, Topsius, the learned German, who was a naturalist's grandson, an Egyptologist's nephew and, himself, a scholar interested in the stories of Herod and of the Egyptian Lagid Dynasty.

On the way to Jerusalem, with a stopover in Malta and Alexandria

Truly subpoenaed by his aunt D. Maria do Patrocínio Neves, a fanatical and intransigent Catholic devout, to go to Jerusalem in pilgrimage, Teodorico leaves home excited by its intrinsic sensual aspect, immediately unveiling the pleasant moments of enjoyment that such a journey could provide. The sensuality and desire raised by the Orient in many men of the 1800's appear well channelled by Eça towards Teodorico Raposo's character, already so prone to such purposes. Teodorico personifies a very cherished idea by the Queiro-

¹¹ Literary Orientalism had in Byron, Moore, Goethe, Hugo, Lamartine, Vigny, Chateaubriand, Gautier, Nerval, Flaubert and in Eça himself, famous exponents among so many others (cf. Lima 1993a, 429, 431).

sian novelistic and its critical vision of the 1800's Portuguese society: cupidity for money.

In Malta, one of the stops in the outlined grand and holy itinerary, Teodorico meets the German Topsisius. By announcing the first encounter of the Portuguese and the German, Eça de Queirós immediately places them in diametrically opposite ethical and existential positions: Teodorico dedicates himself to ephemeral futilities and obligations of daily life; Topsisius is persuaded by the scholarly duty to clarify all historical-archaeological-scientific matters, as much enigmatic as they would reveal themselves.

From the circumstantial communication then started arises an unavoidable noticing, that both had the same itinerary, despite the different motivations that moved them: the German wished to visit the holy places (Judea and Galilee) and Alexandria to «collect notes» for the two works he cherished; the Portuguese, self-interested nephew, accomplishing a pilgrimage on behalf of his wealthy and devout aunt. By explicit suggestion of the Portuguese, they become «travel comrades» and seal their new status with some beer mugs.

The Franco-Tuscan expedition of 1828-29, sponsored by the Tuscan Grand Duke Leopold II and organized by Jean-François Champollion (1790-1832) jointly with his disciple and friend, the Italian Ippolito Rosellini (1800-1843)¹², allowed Champollion to read, translate and copy hieroglyphic texts, from Alexandria to Assuan, in Nubia and Abu Simbel; in short, a little everywhere, proving the quality and validity of the decipherment method he discovered and announced in 1822¹³.

During the journey made into the Orient (Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Anatolia), Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880) and Maxime Du Camp (1822-1894) spent eight months in Egypt (from November 1849 to

¹² In the journey, Champollion and Rosellini would also have the company, among others, of the draughtsman Nestor L'Hôte (1804-1842) and Pierre François Lehoux (1803-1883).

¹³ Coordinated by Rosellini, the expedition resulted in several epigraphic reliefs and drawings of the main ancient monuments, which would be gathered in fourteen handwritten volumes, latter published in ten volumes in the work *I Monumenti dell'Egitto e della Nubia, disegnati dalla spedizione scientifico-letteraria Toscana in Egitto* (1832 to 1844). This work joined the *Description de L'Égypte* (1809-1829), produced by the Napoleonic expedition scholars, and converted itself in one of the major works of obliged research of the newly created discipline of Egyptology.

July 1850). The two friends sailed up the Nile, from Alexandria into the area today called Lake Nuba, in Sudanese territory, having the opportunity to cross the desert riding a camel and to climb the pyramids¹⁴.

In 1869, twenty years after Flaubert/Du Camp, it would be the occasion for Eça de Queirós himself, with his friend and future brother-in-law, D. Luís de Castro Pamplona, 5th Earl of Resende, to establish a pair to meet the Orient and to attend the opening of the Suez Canal. A few months earlier than Eça de Queirós and D. Luís de Castro Pamplona, it had been the time of Ricardo de Guimarães, viscount of Benalcanfor, to visit Cairo with his travel companion, the Englishman Haking¹⁵.

The intellectual atmosphere created in Romantic Europe, of enthralled enthusiasm and curiosity for the exoticism and the aura of mystery from Egypt, rapidly made it into a more than desirable, almost mandatory, destination. Soon, the attraction for the hidden secrets of the ancient Egyptian civilization made adventurers and scholars from all kinds depart into an eagerness for discovering and collecting Egyptian antiquities without precedents, beginning a time that had almost nothing of archaeology but, instead, could well be designated as an organized and systematic «pillage of antiquities».

The idea of journey's comradeship of which *A Relíquia* gives testimony through the characters of the Portuguese Teodorico and the German Topsius follows, therefore, a well attested cultural habit of the 1800's in which Eça himself took part. Moreover, already Théophile Gautier (1811-1872), French poet and critic, had done the same in *Le Roman de la momie* (1858), reporting his travel companions' adventures in Egypt, the Englishman Lord Evandale and the German

¹⁴ In the return from the Orient, Gustave Flaubert would write, between June and September 1851, *Voyage en Égypte* (only published posthumously, in 1881), an account on the stay that the novelist himself considered a monument of his personal memory, finding reminiscence of it in all his work. *The Voyage* by Flaubert is an incalculable literary document and a precious testimony of Egypt of the time. Maxime du Camp in turn, besides his *Le Nil (Égypte et Nubie)* of 1853, dedicated to «a Théophile Gautier», also made 150 calotypes, which makes him one of the first photographic reporters of his time, which publishes in *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie, dessins photographiques recueillis pendant les années 1849-1850 et 1851. Accompagnés d'un texte explicatif et précédés d'une introduction*.

¹⁵ Cf. Araújo 1988, 25 (note 13), 169, 177 (note 23).

Dr. Rumphius¹⁶. Also Gautier had travelled through the Orient, witnessed the opening of the Suez Canal and was touched by its breathtaking sensations. It is still admitted that Eça de Queirós, profound admirer of Gautier, has taken from him, besides the taste for exotic names, elements for the characterisation of his German Topsisius.

In Eça's plot – naturally very critic, but eventually for that reason, also very effective – the characters of both Teodorico and Topsisius appear as personages strongly affected by very distinct hereditary and educational factors¹⁷. The literary game of contrasting their ancestries is explicit and it is expected that the inevitable difference of habits, customs and cultures of both men would be emphasized from it.

The Luso-German comradeship blatantly brings together two fellows situated in distinct intellectual levels, with different existential attitudes.

The stay and experiences of Teodorico and Topsisius in Alexandria are described by Eça from the point of view of the difference of being and staying of both characters, where material and spiritual hardly comes together. Teodorico delights in sloth and in the sensual pleasures provided by the delightful Mary, an Englishwoman from York. For her, Teodorico renounced to see «...o Cairo, o Nilo e a eterna Esfinge, deitada à porta do deserto, sorrindo da Humanidade vã...»¹⁸.

Contrasting the Portuguese cultural disdain for the millennial Egyptian culture, the German Topsisius pleased with visiting ruins and, under his umbrella, always holding a wagged pencil, noted down everything he could¹⁹. The Luso-German contrast is complete.

In everything they are different and distinguished, the Topsisius «*Of Imperial Germany*» and the «*Raposo, Portuguese, from overseas*»²⁰. The behavioural and intellectual dichotomy drawn by Eça de Queirós makes Teodorico Raposo as someone who is criticized by Topsisius and,

¹⁶ Gautier 1980, 9.

¹⁷ Cf. Reis 1996, 396.

¹⁸ «...Cairo, the Nile and the eternal Sphinx, laid on the desert door, smiling of vain Humanity...»: Queirós 2004a, 74.

¹⁹ Queirós 2004a, 113.

²⁰ Queirós 2004a, 71.

in a way, ridiculed by the sensuality of the narcissistic seducer. In the memorial writing of Teodorico it is clearly understood this feeling of inferiority, in the same way as it shows, here and there, some critical disdain, filled with mediocrity, about his German «companion». The fellow travellers even have a serious disagreement, even though it ends with an honourable hand shake.

The notes of patriotism or, if one prefers, the anti-German sentiment, are deep traits of Eça de Queirós' French culture²¹. The writer reveals, in some passages of *A Relíquia*, reflections which he adopted from French mentality and vision about Weimar Germany and German affairs of the second half of the 19th century, after the Franco-Prussian war of 1870, that is, during Bismarck's mandate as Prussian chancellor, especially from 1870 to his resignation in 1890.

Topsius' strong intellectual individualism, extraordinariness and excessive patriotic vanity are, to Eça, active features of the pragmatism, militarism, unmeasured ambition and aggressiveness of Bismarck's Germany.

The panorama of evident superiority of Topsius towards the Portuguese Teodorico, to which Eça bows himself in several passages, is motivated by a pronounced anti-German background. The depreciation and ridiculing of the savant German's pedantic erudition are ways to sublimate the differences of attitude present in the Luso-German encounter and to criticize the supremacy and lack of respect from the German.

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Under the sign of the journey to the Orient, *A Relíquia* therefore rests, immediately, in the Luso-German relationship of Teodorico and Topsius. Hence, the work appears in the narrative drawn by Eça de Queirós as an intimidation of the Portuguese to the German or, if we will, a confrontation between, on the one hand, Science and Reason;

²¹ Cf. Lino 1993, 51-56.

on the other, everyday life, as a quotidian simultaneously made of belief, faith, reality and farce.

Amid the mediocre, unreal, fanciful and almost caricatural general environment, the tendency towards Oriental exoticism and the charm for ancient civilizations which *A Relíquia* reveals, is result of the European intellectual attitude and of the Queirosian conception that privileges the sensibility and the sensory refinement and prefers the delightful, jocose and lyric picturesque²². The impressionistic record of the environments and of the historical reconstitutions (according to some, copied from Flaubert²³) is very well accomplished, for example, in the «portraits» of Alexandria.

It is obvious that in here lies a clear influence of the Oriental itineraries of Eça himself. The Orient journey in 1869, to watch along D. Luís de Castro Pamplona, the Earl of Resende, the inauguration of the Suez Canal, took place in a decisive phase of Eça's mental evolution and left visible impressions in his literary creation, in works such as *Egipto. Notas de Viagem* (1926), *Folhas Caídas* (1966) (both, therefore, published posthumously), *O Mandarim* or *A Relíquia*²⁴.

The mythic and romantic Orient captured and integrated his literature in the Orientalism in vogue in the Europe of his time. The very idea of travel narrative he practiced, as a traveller and as an author responsible for the creation of his characters and of his diegetic material, is another vector of his assimilation within the redoubt of «Orientalist discourse» or aesthetic-literary orientation.

The dialogues between Teodorico and Topsius are, as Eça's style showed, natural, lively, and quite witty, based on a straightforward psychological and attitudinal confrontation-complement.

As a matter of fact, it is known how Eça de Queirós valued good taste and manners in sociability, the aristocratic climate of flashy and

²² Cf. Mendes 1983, 27, 28, 33.

²³ Cf. Saraiva, Lopes 1989, 927, 928. See also Lima 1993a, 429-434.

²⁴ Cf. Saraiva, Lopes 1989, 937. Besides the mentioned fictional works, there are many other Queirosian works where there are references or passages of orientalist inspiration, such as *A Correspondência de Fradique Mendes*, *Notas Contemporâneas*, *Os Maias* and *Lendas de Santos* (cf. Lima 1993b, 437; Araújo 1988, 219). See also Lima 1995.

relevant conversation, as well as the hilarious situations frequently generated by *l'art de bien parler*²⁵.

Regardless any fanciful misrepresentation of both characters, the Luso-German Teodorico-Topsius dichotomy-complement drives and sustains the narrative's actions and the incidents during the «pilgrimage» of both men into Oriental lands. The Luso-German sociability and communicability, with the mentioned hues of pious hypocrisy or of intellectual superiority, derive of a simplistic mental-literary construction that puts, on one side, the «illustrious Lusitanian» Teodorico, pseudo-learned tourist, somewhat queasy and distracted, as a paradigm of animality and futility; and, on the other, the «more learned» Topsius, as expression of erudition and wisdom. Thus, the outlined socio-pedagogical exercise reveals itself quite efficient.

Through the cultural dimension underlying the formation of Eça de Queirós as a writer, the double sides embodied by these two characters is the result of the derogatory trend that marked French mentality, from 1870 onwards, relating to all things German. In this way, the material of *A Relíquia* is a precious testimony of the Orientalist billow that marked European culture in the last decades of the 19th century.

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²⁵ Cf. Mendes 1983, 33.

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