

## Manduca's Choice: Machado de Assis, the Crimean War, and the Affects of the Semiglobal

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### **Abstract**

This essay closely examines the role played by the Crimean War in Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis's 1900 novel *Dom Casmurro*. In portraying the narrator of the novel, Bento Santiago, nicknamed "Casmurro," and his boyhood friend, Manduca, as quarreling over their preference in the 1854-56 conflict between Russia and an Anglo-French-Ottoman coalition, Machado delineates certain character traits in the two friends, differentiating the sympathetic Manduca, doomed or die young, and the dour, longer-lasting Casmurro. But Machado also comments on the global reach of the Crimean War (in which Brazil was neutral) and of the global canvas on which a Brazilian novelist of this era inevitably drew. Though the world was not as well-connected as it is today, these reverberations allow us to speak of a developing semi-global environment in the mid-nineteenth century. Given Machado's own racial background, and the persistence of slavery and colonialism worldwide, examining the Crimean War reference in the novel can speak both to the narrative strategies within *Dom Casmurro* and to the novel's wider sociopolitical applicability.

**Keywords:** Crimean War, Machado de Assis, race, affect, friendship

### **Epitaph of A Small War**

In the aftermath of the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, the neutral position of the Brazilian government received much attention. This was especially true of how the posture of Itamaraty, the Brazilian foreign ministry, seemed at times to differ from the personal policy of former President Jair Bolsonaro (Fleck). But even under the current Lula administration, of very different ideological tincture, the essential neutrality of Brazil's position seems to still be maintained (see Libardi). What is of note for our discussion is that Brazil was expected to weigh in on the Ukrainian question; despite its geographical distance to the armed conflict, Brazilian national opinion mattered, and the world expected Brazil to manifest some response, even, as Manuella Libardi has indicated, to show the power of the Global South. In today's world, and with Brazil host to one of the largest Ukrainian diaspora communities in the world (Morski), as portrayed by one of its most illustrious writers, Clarice Lispector, the global expectation of a Brazilian response is only to be expected.

This essay will discuss the work and milieu of an earlier world-famous Brazilian writer, Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis, and will take as its point of departure the Brazilian response to a

far earlier conflict in the same region, the Crimean War of 1854-1856. I will contend that even in what has been called the semi-global context of the mid-nineteenth century, this conflict mattered to Brazilians, and Brazilians in turn responded to it in ways that were consequential and determinative of assessments of the conflict's aftermath. Most of what is now the Global South was under colonial rule in this era, and Brazil itself, though independent, was an empire that still permitted slavery. Yet that the Brazilian government had no official posture towards the conflict opened up an interesting discursive space. I will examine how this response is manifested in the fiction of Machado de Assis. In Machado's 1899 novel *Dom Casmurro*, the eponymous character is reminiscing about a friend of his youth named Manduca. Manduca says, of the then-raging Crimean War, that "the Allies are bound to win" (170). Dom Casmurro responds, "no, senhor, right is on the side of the Russians" (170), a political reference is later depicted as a memory after Manduca dies young of leprosy.

This reference is fairly prominent and quite incongruous, and as such, it has attracted considerable comment. Indeed, the Brazilian journalistic and media world had the Manduca reference readily available when Russia invaded the Ukrainian region of Crimea in 2014. The Brazilian media scholar João Baptista de Abreu noted Manduca's declaration that the Russians would never enter Constantinople. But Abreu warned that even a hundred and fifty years later the area's destiny was still unsettled, "Mas numa região como os Balcãs e a península junto ao Mar Negro, os conflitos e mudanças de mão de territórios multiétnicos desaconselham predições eternas, como as do jovem Manduca." (n. p.). What Karl Ludwig Pfeiffer calls the "mechanically repeated absurdities" (379) of the mantra, "The Russians will never enter Constantinople" is thus still a question that is open today.

Of course, neither the Russian aggression of 2014 nor that of 2022 brought the Russian Army anywhere near present-day Istanbul. What Machado is asking us to do, and which we as contemporary readers need to heed, is to ask what emotional stake Manduca has in this assertion, and therefore what stake his counterpart, the novel's protagonist Bento Santiago, also known as "Dom Casmurro," has in countering it. This locution is a statement at once intensely specific and abstractly transtemporal. It is an opinion of the moment but also a sample of memory. This ambiguity is at the core of this essay's argument about how the Crimean war reference matters not just historically, but novelistically. This essay is largely about Machado's deployment of the Crimean War, but to understand this deployment, we will have to look at the relationship between Brazil and this conflict.

The openness and contingency of the Crimean reference are concomitant with its sense of distance. Brazil was far removed from the Crimean War, though as a global event, the war necessarily affected it. The British navy gave serious thought to attacking the Russian schooner *Rogneda* "if it

attempted to leave the harbor of Rio” (Rath 86). Hermann James commented that prospective British financing of a railway line connecting Rio and Sao Paulo to more remote areas was imperiled by “the financial crisis in Great Britain resulting from the Crimean War” (371). To be sure, all three major combatants (if we remember Alaska was still Russian) had a colonial presence in America. Moreover, Britain and France, with their Guyanese colonies, had imperial possessions that bordered Brazil. Even remote Russia had at one point considered establishing colonies in Brazil (Bartley 18-19), and even Brazil, perhaps because of his dynastic monarchy of European descent, became, in 1828, the first country in Latin America that Imperial Russia recognized (Bartley 158-59). Yet, Brazil was in geographical and cultural terms among the most distant countries in the world from the conflict in Crimea. Manduca’s preference for the side that included Britain could also be seen as an abolitionist gesture, as Britain had abolished slavery two decades before, and, as Jessie Reeder has pointed out, the British navy was “used to threaten Brazil over the slave trade in 1848-9” (232), just a few years before the Crimean conflict.

It is the contention of this essay that Machado de Assis’s deployment of the Crimean reference in *Dom Casmurro* registers the emotional impact and effect of this distance, even as the Crimean War itself remains of tangible, if minor, importance in the text and to the author. There emerges a semi-global affect that can operate as a major conduit in reading the novel in its full range of meaning. Casmurro, as the narrator, goes on to say that both he and Manduca derived their information from the newspapers. The newspapers in turn derived their information from newspapers in Europe. “But,” Casmurro speculates, “it is possible too that each of us held the opinion of his own temperament.” (170) Casmurro goes on to say he was “always a bit Muscovite in my ideas” (170). This goes beyond issues of political opinion to those of affect and character. The link is drawn between the Crimean reference and the more psychological and ethical concerns of the novel, including its portrayal of private life. *Dom Casmurro* is written across a temporal chasm from the era of the Crimean War. But it is still possible for one life—for instance, that of Machado himself—to span that chasm. This is a chasm that covers the deposition of Emperor Dom Pedro II and the abolition of slavery, two events about which Machado’s texts evince profound and complex affect. The Crimean War might seem an idyll compared to the later world wars of the twentieth century, but Machado tacitly positions the Crimean War era, and its seems-global semi-global affect, as idyllic, even from the vantage point of the late nineteenth century. The Crimean War occurred before the height of laissez-faire capitalism and the last wave of European imperialism, whose reference channels a ramified set of emotions that are psychological, political, critical, and nostalgic. Crucially, Machado’s Crimean reference is at once

within history and within a fictional framing of that history—a historical reference on one level becomes a fictive one on another.

A statement describing one time can also describe all times. To say, as Manduca, “The Russians will not enter Constantinople” (172) is another version of saying, for example, “Jerusalem will never be Christian!” Both assertions would have ended up being true in history, but the novel, written at a discrete time and comprising its own textual field, does not “know” that. Indeed, the novel, as a novel, is open about the question of whether the Russians will ever enter Constantinople. The narrative recognizes that it is a different question, existentially, than that of the deaths of persons or even countries. These deaths are bound to happen at some point. But it is entirely possible that, through all the eons, the Russians will never enter Constantinople; or it is possible that they will. This sense of openness and contingency is analogous to that which consoles the narrator when he looks back on his friendship with the dead Manduca. This is especially pertinent considering that Casmurro’s adult friendship with Escobar, who Casmurro eventually suspects of committing adultery with Casmurro’s wife Capitu, transpires so disastrously after they had become far more intimate.

The Crimean reference in *Dom Casmurro* is not the only reference to the Black Sea era or to Eastern Europe in Machado’s oeuvre. Machado’s poem “Polonia” was written in the aftermath of the failed Polish insurrection of 1863 against Russia:

Pobre nação! — é longo o teu martírio;  
 A tua dor pede vingança e termo;  
 Muito hás vertido em lágrimas e sangue;  
 É propícia esta hora. O sol dos livres  
 Como que surge no dourado Oriente.  
 Não ama a liberdade  
 Quem não chora contigo as dores tuas;  
 E não pede, e não ama, e não deseja  
 Tua ressurreição, finada heróica! (Ishimatsu 56)

The use of the word “ressurreição” is notable in the light of the title of Machado’s first novel and that the juxtaposition of resurrection and demise also runs together with that novel’s tragic plot. The speaker of the poem is clearly in sympathy with Poland against Russia, as Poland is part of the personal self. Poland is lavished with praise and made to seem like a person or object of natural beauty and splendor, full of excess reflecting the Romantic mood of the Polish patriots of 1863 (among whom, famously was Joseph Conrad’s father, Apollo Korzenowski). That the rebellion failed only

heightens the romanticism; the martyrdom will only increase Poland's glory. This is very far from the dispassionate portrayal of Eastern Europe and its environs in the fiction. Indeed, as Edgar Knowlton pointed out, Machado is emulating the impassioned, Romantic style of Poland's Adam Mickiewicz.

But "Polonia" is also redolent of the kind of passions that, in the far more analytical *Dom Casmurro*, Bento, and Manduca must feel in order to disagree about the situation. In general, to take account of the wider world does not detract from either the personal subjectivity or inevitable Brazilian context of Machado's writing. Cosmopolitanism is related to subjectivity and context, although it does not just displace or allegorize them. Machado's poem expresses empathy and distance. As Randy Boyagoda argues, the short story "In the Ark" presents a vista where

Machado unexpectedly extends from the atemporal realm of the mythic-Biblical into late 19th-century geopolitics, by way of a leap from Shem and Japheth arguing over territory to a suddenly related citation of the war between Russia and the Ottoman Empire in the late 1870s. (n. p.)

This reference is at once useful to elucidate the tenor of the Crimean reference and also poses a potential contrast. At the very end of the story, when Noah has exhausted all options in preventing his three sons from quarreling over territory after the Ark has landed, he throws up his hands and asks God a rhetorical question: "They do not yet possess the earth and already they are fighting over borders. What will happen when Turkey and Russia come along?" (389). It is then said that the sons do not understand, situating the Turkey-Russia remark in the story is anachronistic, and disruptive, in a forward sense.

This parallels how, to the reader of *Dom Casmurro* in 1899, the novel suddenly refers to a conflict of nearly a half-century before. The shared affect though is one of distance; the fighting between Turkey and Russia—which, as Boyagoda refers, might well refer to not the Crimean War but the post-1870 rivalry that was putatively settled at the 1878 Congress of Berlin—is a reference to a datum that is once a fact, but a distant one. Whereas there is a steady-state aspect to the reference in the short story, the Crimean War reference in *Dom Casmurro* is marked as part of a past, it betokens nostalgia. Small wars fought by other countries can register as indices of youth, because they remind adults of past times but did not involve direct harm or risk to them bodily. In Brazil, nostalgia for the Crimean War was necessarily unaccompanied by the specifically national "displays of bygone valor, royal pomp, and Orientalist flair" (Kriegel 113) that Lara Kriegel characterizes British commemorations of the war as brandishing. Yet, there is in Machado's reference the sense of a distinct aura of the past. Even if this is a past without specific national investments, it possesses a personal

investment for Casmurro. Machado, in turn, is aware that, if his own nation is not invested in Crimean memory, other nations are.

As Leonardo Francisco Soares shows, Machado certainly had Brazilian equivalents in mind when he was talking about the Balkans in his *crônicas* of the 1870s. But he was also talking about the Balkans, and his ability to do so is concomitant with his status as a global writer. Soares argues that Machado intercalated anecdotes from provincial Brazil with accounts of Balkan warfare to show the human costs of war but also to increase his mordant, ironic distance as a commentator. But there is not just a sense of contrast here, but analogy. Brazil is comparable to southeastern Europe in terms of being, in one way, part of the West, and, in another, othered from the West. Indeed, from the perspective of 1899, the Crimean War solicited, in the people of Britain and France, the two metropolitan readerships who had the leverage to bring a great Brazilian novelist to world repute. The Crimean War signifier also referred to the country, Russia, whose literature was at that time most in vogue in those metropolitan centers. Poland and Russia were outside the obligatory Old World, of the classics and the Grand Tour. Roberto Schwarz has commented that Russian literature indeed had a similar dynamic to the Brazilian canon, that in both countries “progress is a disgrace and backwardness is a shame” (*Potatoes*, 13).

Indeed, the mordant irony of the *crônicas*, as analyzed by Soares, provides both a modal bridge between the hortatory championship of the lyric speaker and the detached polemical difference of the Manduca-Bento dyad. Considering the *crônicas* were written in the 1870s, they also offer a chronological bridge. Manduca and Bento Santiago differ on the Crimean War, as they do not take the same position, but this is not a quarrel that imperils their friendship; rather, it is actually a topic that strengthens the bond between them. The quarrel, as Casmurro can affectionally recall in later years, is a reminder of their friendship. Conversely, what if it is a situation that of course so often occurs in Machado’s fiction, the two men had been romantic rivals? Given Bento Santiago’s wont, Manduca would be under suspicion of an affair with a woman in whom Casmurro was interested. This would be, unlike with respect to the Crimean War, a case of them taking the same side, but then being rivals because they occupy the same psychological space. That one friend supports the Russians, the other the Allies, on the other hand gives the friendship the space it needs to flourish by occupying *contrasting* positions.

Because Casmurro’s love for Capitu bends towards success soon after Manduca dies, Capitu and Manduca have a complementary relationship to each other, while war and love are opposites. Bento writes “life is lost, the battle still is won!” (111) as the final verse of his sonnet. He then reverses

the terms shortly after. But it is not just a simple case of charity and love versus justice and war. Bento and Manduca will not seriously fight if the issue does not matter too much. Clearly, the fate of the two young men and their country is not really going to be affected by the Crimean War one way or the other. Political disagreement is an antidote to mimetic desire as sketched by René Girard (a figure propagated in Brazil through the work of João Cezar de Castro Rocha). Mimetic envy seeks an object of love out of a wish to be the same as the rival, but political disagreement allows rivals to occupy divergent spaces. To put it another way: a love triangle is defined by the fact that two people feel *the same way* about a third person. Or, as Girard would put it, mimetic desire “covets the fruit because it is forbidden,” and covets “that which is forbidden by the mediator” (Girard xxxix). A political disagreement is defined by the fact that two people feel *differently* with respect to the same reference.

Ostensibly, the disagreement would seem to be incendiary, while the agreement in affect would seem to be reconciliatory. This is heightened by the two rivals in a love triangle being drawn by desire, affection, and private motives; whereas in all wars, including the Crimean, aggression, rivalry, disregard for human life is presumed. But the actual effect is the opposite; on the one hand, Casmurro and Manduca loving the same woman would, especially given Casmurro’s possessive mentality, be disastrous, while on the other, a political disagreement about a faraway event is merely a curiosity to be affectionately recalled as one of the whimsicalities of an early friendship. Political disagreement, at least momentarily, can make the reference, in Girard’s term, a “beneficent sensation” (20), which for a time evades mimetic envy. This is especially pertinent given that Casmurro has the vices of detachment and insensitivity without the attendant virtues of nonintervention and disaffiliation. He does not really care about other people, but he is involved in their lives in ways that hurt them. In the hyperlocal spaces of Rio: the Tijuca, where Casmurro and Capitu have their great but ephemeral joy; the Catete, where Casmurro realizes we will all become ancient; the Lapa where Ezekiel goes to boarding school, Casmurro is incessantly possessive. In the semi-global arena of the Crimean conflict, however, he can let go. Fernando Varela has pointed to the importance of houses in Machado’s work as intermediate spaces between the subjective and the national where people can make choices about their own lives. The Crimean reference, a narrative epitaph of a small war (to allude to the title of an early translation into English of Machado’s *Posthumous Memoirs of Bras Cubas*) is another kind of house, and another kind of choice, where Casmurro and Manduca can find momentary amity.

### Displacement or Surface?

Now that we have canvassed the wide field in which the Crimean reference resonates, we should focus on the one major solution that has been proposed for the apparent enigma the reference poses. John Gledson suggests we take an “allegorical leap” (142) and see the subject not as the Crimean but the Paraguayan War, which, according to Gledson, would have fit in with Machado’s general view of war as “a criminal and pointless waste of energy and life” (142). In other words, the Crimean reference should be read, according to Gledson, as a displacement of the Paraguayan war.

Here, Crimean distance disguises Paraguayan proximity. Yet a poem of the same sort as “Polonia” but about Paraguay—unlikely in this era to have written by a Brazilian—would not have the sense of distance which aesthetically grounds “Polonia.” This perhaps sheds light on the split critical opinion on whether Machado seriously registered the War of the Triple Alliance. Frank McLynn states, “As the novels of Machado de Assis make clear, for most Brazilians the War of Triple Alliance against Paraguay in the 1860s was a remote affair which scarcely impinged on their lives” (81). Yet, Machado’s most eminent reader, Roberto Schwarz, opines that Machado’s depiction of the Paraguayan War, in his early novel *Iaia Garcia*, “lacks a clear conceptualization of what the Paraguayan War was, and its inclusion by means of private motives is clever but devoid of precisely that dimension” (*To the Victor*, 96). Schwarz goes on to say that this is not a failing that can be ascribed uniquely to Machado, that even much later the Paraguayan war was “poorly understood.”

There is a passage in Machado’s first novel, *Resurrection*, which describes the novel as secular (*Resurrection*, 161) and thus even the solitude of its protagonists has to be collective. This passage is indicative of how the sociality of the self in Machado can accommodate political references such as the Crimean without endorsing a positivistic mentality (which *The Posthumous Memoirs of Bras Cubas* indeed viciously satirizes). Within this semi-global matrix, political events can measure personal growth and benchmark personal memory.

Thus, the Crimean War can be a displacement of the author’s own identity and also significant in itself, not just in reference to the war against Paraguay. Machado recognized the Crimean War both as a signal point in world history. But he also saw the war’s occurrence as marking a point of emergence in his fledgling literary career. The Crimean War in *Dom Casmurro* is placed in the good old days, before the fall. Maria Fonseca has placed Machado’s Crimean reference within a global literary and cultural context:

A propósito da guerra da Crimeia, a Machado de Assis (nascido em 1839), leitor agudo e informado, não deve ter escapado o poema de Tennyson e tampouco a crítica de

Baudelaire, mesmo que lidos posteriormente.... era o tempo em que próprio Machado começava a colaborar em jornais e revista na cidade do Rio de Janeiro. (11))

Both the Crimean War, and the War of the Triple Alliance involving Paraguay, were small wars with large implications, that resonated worldwide. At least one man, the Polish “soldier of fortune” (Warren) Roberto Adolfo Chodasiewicz, fought in both conflicts. In Gledson’s interpretation, and as Reginald Daniel puts it, “Bento symbolizes Brazil, and Manduca symbolizes Paraguay” (Daniel 117). This equivalence would make Brazil, Russia, and Paraguay, the Ottoman Empire. The implied comparison of Asuncion to Constantinople as capitals might have seemed a reach, even to the megalomania of the Paraguayan dictator, Francisco Solano López himself. But what Gledson’s analogy fails to incorporate is that, though the (unachieved) war aim of the Russians was to capture Constantinople, the Russians were fighting Britain and France much more than they were the Turks. To be clear, the situation was exactly reversed as Russia, which Gledson thinks is Brazil, was the sole antagonist waging war against a Triple Alliance. Though Brazil as object of Machadian self-critique would make Russia a plausible analogy, Machado’s own cultural affiliations were far more with the Western allies, especially France.

There is an inescapable pertinence to Gledson’s assertion. The Paraguayan war is easily substitutable for the role the Crimean reference. This is seen in the short story “Mr Diplomat,” set in 1854, the year the Crimean War broke out, and features a young man, Rangel, whose pretentious fondness for “airs and graces” (*Collected Stories* 710) leads to him being called “Mr Diplomat.” Fonseca’s point is that the era of the Crimean War coincides with the development of Machado as an author. This can be seen by analogy in the case of Rangel, situating himself both within Brazilian society and as a sort of cosmopolitan dandy whose aspirations, and pretensions, transcend the national. Rangel is a typical Machado protagonist. He has grand aspirations, but he ends up living “only in his imagination” (711). Finally deciding to win himself a bride in midlife, he loses the beautiful Joanhina to his rival Queirós. Rangel lives the rest of his life alone and fruitlessly. In two important respects, though, Rangel’s fate parallels and inverts that of that of *Dom Casmurro*, published a few years later. Rangel is contrasted to Othello, who kills Desdemona, but Rangel conversely serves as a witness to the wedding of Queirós and Joanhina, and later considers enlisting “when the Paraguayan War broke out” (718).

But these two parallels challenge the monologism of Gledson’s reduction of Crimea to Paraguay on the most manifest level. For instance, If *Dom Casmurro*, is, as Helen Caldwell has called it, a Brazilian Othello, and Bento’s suspicion of his wife has an ever more tragic reverberation in

leading to Casmurro's alienation from his son who then dies tragically young, we must understand the alterity and self-reflexivity contained in the figure of Othello.

Both the Brazilian Othello and the original British Othello are also *Turkish* Othellos. Most of Shakespeare's *Othello* is set in Cyprus, an area that both in Machado's time and in the time Shakespeare actually wrote the play was Turkish. Even more, when Othello dies, he recalls that, in Aleppo, he had attacked a Turk, a "circumcised dog" and "smote him" (331). Then Othello, in mimicking the action he used to smite the Turk, kills himself. Othello others himself as quasi-Turk even as he reaffirms his futile loyalty to the Venetian state in his final gesture. For Machado, given his racial heritage and the role that slavery and abolition played in the political drama of his adult Brazilian lifetime, the Othello reference betokens blackness. But, given the prominence of the Crimean War reference, also Turkishness. In the Shakespeare reference, there is a direct linkage between one of the major parties of the Crimean Conflict and the book's major plot theme of skepticism and fear of adultery. All this points to the Crimean reference not just being an interesting piece of trivia, for it is something far more central to the understanding of the book. It may supply the answer to the question Gledson asks "why the complex argument about the war itself?" (141)

We can certainly agree with Gledson that the near war in "Mr. Diplomat" assumes the same place as the distant war in *Dom Casmurro*, as a conflict extrinsic to and distant from the fundamental agony of failed love. That the Crimean War in *Dom Casmurro* is an easy stand-in for the War of the Triple Alliance is suggested by the way both wars were basically three against one (Britain, France, Ottoman Empire, Russia, Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, Paraguay). Yet Gledson's reading, as Paul Dixon has pointed out, is at once compelling but monologic (760).

It may be wise to follow the counsel of Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus's renowned 2009 article and perform "surface reading" (1) on the Crimean reference. To do this would be to see the Crimean War reference as it appears to be, rather than uncomplicating reading it as a substitute for a Paraguayan reference deemed more immediately relevant to the text's milieu. Instead of being a displacement of the War of the Triple Alliance, the Crimean reference could stand for the Crimean conflict. This would evoke whatever the Crimean War might mean or has meant to the characters and the author. It is tempting to see a seemingly irrelevant detail as relevant by tethering it to a national story.

But what if Machado meant to speak about Crimea *literally*? Russophone and Lusophone literary cultures were not in as regular contact in this era as either language was with the other major literatures of Europe. But this did not mean there was no contact whatsoever. As early as the later

eighteenth century, Russian authors like Aleksandr Sumarokov and Gavriil Kamenev knew of Camões. Lusophones were, in turn, very aware of contemporary Russian writing. As William Edgerton has shown, Magalhaes Lima in Portugal corresponded with Tolstoy, and recommended to him the work of Antero de Quental (51). José Luiz Passos has noted that Machado was “guided” (166) by Tolstoy in his depiction of adultery. Machado, might well have known that the Russian novelist himself fought in the Crimean War, as detailed in his *Sevastopol Sketches*. Reginald Daniel has seen a tacit influence of Nikolai Gogol in an 1888 *crónica* of Machado’s (62). The literary relationship between the Russian and Portuguese languages exceeds the relationship of Russia and Portugal as states on opposite peripheries of Europe. It is global, transnational, and beyond the limits imposed by state actors. The space delimited by a Brazilian writer referring to Russo-Turkish conflict holds potential for global innovation.

Eduardo de Assis Duarte argues that nineteenth-century Lusophone literature was “constructed from a European perspective nearly always based on a Christian axiology” (134). But the Black Sea, Muslim resonances of the Crimean War, tug the Old World milieu slightly away from this axiology, making Machado’s novel slightly less Christian. This becomes important when we remember the Black Sea area’s racial and cultural heterogeneity, including the presence of Indigenous peoples such as the Crimean Tatars (see Williams 42) and Machado’s own Afro-Brazilian racial identity. Crimea, and the Black Sea littoral in general, are exceptionally culturally multivalent (see Birns 169). The Cherokee writer and scholar Jace Weaver has indeed spoken of a trans-Indigenous “Red Atlantic,” which “encompasses the Atlantic and its major adjacent bodies of water” (15). Since, conceivably, a drop of water could move, through the Atlantic, the Mediterranean, and the Black Sea, from Niterói to Sevastopol without ever touching land, the Crimea could be part of this transnational Atlantic. With the Crimean reference, Machado conjures something that is significantly, but not totally, European and is thus analogous to his own identity.

In that respect, the Crimean War is not just “Russian” for Machado; it is also “Turkish.” Throughout Machado’s oeuvre, the signifier of the Turk is used as for instance in “Admiral’s Night” as a symbol of “distant lands” (*Collected Stories* 587). The slippers from Tunis in *Quincas Borba*—that form such a crucial part of Rubião’s sartorial self-presentation at the beginning of the novel also have a Turkish aspect, given that what is now Tunisia at that time was very much a part of the Ottoman Empire. Machado looked to the eastern and southern peripheries of Europe partially to trace his own place in the Global South. But he also made references to these places partially out of a sense of intrinsic, if distanced, interest.

The Crimean War was an event sufficiently distant for most world citizens to give them the status of onlookers with an almost aesthetic detachment not unbefitting a Machado protagonist. Marx and Engels, in their coverage of the war for the *New York Tribune*, were unsentimental about either side of the conflict. But they nonetheless gave a clear warning: “But let Russia get possession of Turkey, and her strength is increased nearly half, and she becomes superior to all the rest of Europe put together. Such an event would be an unspeakable calamity to the revolutionary cause” (n. p.). On the other hand, Brazil was also likened to Russia; as Hendrik Kraay points out, Pedro II was compared to “Peter the Great of Russia” (38). If the *setting* of *Dom Casmurro* precedes Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Turgenev, these had circulated worldwide by the time of the *writing* of the novel. It is not necessarily true that one could hold a Muscovite temperament simply from having read Russian literature in translation. But Machado’s idea of his narrator’s character could have been influenced by such reading.

But what is the Russia-Casmurro link? “Casmurro” means taciturn, stubborn, and keeping oneself within a wall. Casmurreaneity is the dour self-centeredness that plagues the novel’s narrator and ruins his life and those of others. Do casmurreaneity and Russophilia coincide? Is casmurreaneity a metaphor for the white male ego, for the identity that is more ethnically monolithic? This is particularly relevant to Machado, as Machado is racially marked as a person of color, whereas Dom Casmurro and most of Machado’s world-resisting male protagonists are not.

Sidney Chalhoub has suggested that Machado’s narrators are meant to be self-exposing raconteurs of white male privilege. Paulo Dutra has argued that we cannot unilaterally suppose that any wealthy person in Brazil in Machado’s time would necessarily be white (n. p.). Yet reading through the lens of Chalhoub can potentially help us see how so many of Machado’s characters are from a slaveholding aristocracy, which is exactly the opposite of what Machado himself was. As such, there is always a sense of inversion and displacement, even if he is not directly indicting or even satirizing this milieu. In this light, Casmurro, as narrator, can be seen less as an *unreliable* narrator than a narrator simply *unconscious* of all the implications of what they are saying. This becomes particularly ramified in *Dom Casmurro*. Firstly, the narrator is the most outwardly unadmirable of Machado’s major texts. Moreover, there are two levels of recollection and reflection in Casmurro’s conception of Manduca and his Crimean opinions. One is when Manduca dies, when Manduca’s friendship with Casmurro is but a few years in the past. But another is at the narrative point of the overall narration. This point occurs when Manduca’s death, and the residue of their friendship, is much further back, and where the entire relationship is informed by the consciousness of the posthumous collapse of Bento’s friendship with Escobar.

In a compressed, functional way, the war itself functions as an intertext or paratext within the novel. The two invented books mentioned in *Dom Casmurro*, *The History of the Suburbs* and *The Panegyric of St. Monica*, are complementary to the Crimean War as a “text.” *The History of The Suburbs* is the work to which Casmurro turns his attention to in the final lines of the book after he has lost—through his own fault—his wife and son. *The Panegyric of St. Monica* is also a point of reference in the past. Casmurro’s fellow seminarian had written it, then left the seminary and the priestly vocation in general, but continued to prize his own authorship and is pleased Casmurro remembers it as well. The content of the panegyric does not really matter; its importance is indexical, as a token. In addition. St. Monica, as the mother of St. Augustine of Hippo, is an African figure and the citation of her refers if ever so slightly to Machado’s own Afro-Brazilian racial background. If, as K. David Jackson notes, the *Panegyric* is “parallel” (255) to the purpose of Bento Santiago’s own autobiographical account, so might be the Crimean reference.

Wilson Martins has commented, “Machado de Assis teve o indesejado destino de se tornar o desafio permanente e incontornável que a literatura brasileira propõe a si mesma” (n. p.). This sense of Machado being inescapable to, yet unassimilable within national imaginaries, haunts attempts to exhaust the Crimean reference in a domestic Brazilian sphere. If, conversely, one sees the Crimean reference, and Machado’s interest in the Muslim and Slavic worlds in general, as part of a deliberate cosmopolitanism, one can see it as a reference that is both domestic and global.

### **The Crimean War and Machadian Authorship**

This final section of the essay will examine how the Crimean War contributes to our overall sense not just of *Dom Casmurro* as a text, but to Machado’s position as an author in general, and how it might be seen in the Anglophone world. There have been three phases of Machado’s popularity in the US. The first, from about 1945 to 1965, was what might be called the OAS-continentalist phase, where the US was trying to discover Latin American culture amid the fault-lines of the Cold War. Despite the acknowledgment of Machado’s aesthetic achievement, he was seen mainly as a cultural phenomenon. The second phase, from 1965 to the end of the twentieth century, saw Machado as a proto-Borges, evoked explicitly in Elizabeth Hardwick’s introduction to the Caldwell translation of *Dom Casmurro*. Hardwick says Borges must have read “his fellow creator born in and living under the Southern Cross” (xviii) parallel to Henry James. This phase is focused on Machado’s stylistic techniques, which were seen as modern and apolitical, whose modernity was indeed guaranteed by their apolitical tinge. Rhett McNeil has argued that Borges had a good sense of Machado through Rafael Cansinos Asséns (81).

Marcel Mendes de Souza has cited that as editor of a magazine, Borges included a published translation of Machado's work, meaning there must have been at least casual awareness (540). But Hardwick's search for a genealogy between Machado and Borges bespeaks not just a need to fit one into the mold of the other but to establish a tradition that was at once regional, either transcending or evading politics. As limited as this approach seems now, we should remember that Machado de Assis was not particularly influential on the Latin American Boom writers. In the 1970s, it was Jorge Amado, not Machado or, for that matter, Clarice Lispector, who was considered the most globally visible Brazilian writer, and that reading Machado racially and politically is a bit more indirect than reading other Latin American novelists in these terms.

The third phase of Machadian reception, still unfolding today, is the Machado, who is not just acknowledged but celebrated as a person of color, writing covertly or, at times, overtly about race and identity. In the current climate, we can engage with what Ratik Asokan called the "overlooked politics" of Machado and also recognize, as Asokan suggests: "in fact, Machado's formal innovation and social criticism are two sides of the same coin" (n. p.) Even more widely, perhaps on, as the work of Caroline Levine suggests, contextualism and political affect can be seen as a form of aesthetic affordance that can unfold "the superimposition of iterable practices over time" (87). The many descriptions of Machado as experimental, ahead of his time, while making perfect sense, also serve, given stereotypes of the experimental as white, male, and producing "limited political engagement" (Duvall 17), to whiten Machado and to disguise his identity as a man of color.

Gledson's reading of Machado's view of the character of Casmurro as an indictment of a collective mentality of the period, even if rigid in literal terms, does have an interpretively productive consequence of moving the reader away from empathizing with Casmurro. The reader might identify with Casmurro because they, the author, and the character presumably, share a certain idiosyncrasy, even if in the first case, this idiosyncrasy might be shared for the duration of the experience of reading. Whereas *Bras Cubas*, though is equal parts mirror and foil, concerning the authorial persona, Dom Casmurro. Though the authorial persona might at times share his reserve, spite, and sense ironic distance, makes such tragic and harmful choices concerning his wife and son that the character goes beyond a negative exemplum to an actively unadmirable figure.

How does our awareness of Casmurro's flaws make us, conversely, evaluate Manduca and his preference among global combatants? The world manifested itself as semi-global in the nineteenth century. News traveled worldwide, but there was still a sense of remoteness that not every country had a direct stake in the conflict. This is seen in Machado's oeuvre, not just in this stray Crimean

reference, but in all the references to Europe, where, despite the continuing sway of cultural colonialism, there is a sense of ironic distance from European heritages and institutions. Manduca picked the less authoritarian side, but Casmurro did not. Yet in Casmurro's *memory* of Manduca's choice, there remains a more plural and ample view of the world.

The private can also, albeit indirectly, be the public. Ignacio Sánchez Prado's analysis of the Mexican writer Sergio Pitol provides a frame useful to readers of Machado de Assis. Sánchez Prado speaks of the "personal and idiosyncratic version of world literature" (22) that Pitol conjectured to enable his writing. Since much of Pitol's global vision centered around Russian and Polish literature, this can help us understand Machado's relationship to the cultural peripheries of Europe. The private meaning of the Paraguayan War was, for Schwarz, a product of "a difficulty a Brazilian writer could not escape" (n.p), the country's cultural peripherality seen in a worldwide perspective. But Machado, even if he did not escape Brazil's marginality completely, could maneuver around it with his global vision—private but also cosmopolitan, manifesting laterally the generative temporal symmetry that Schwarz has repeatedly seen as constitutive of Machado's achievement.

Thus, the private disagreement between the two young men about a distant public event also betokens Brazil's nascent internationalism. Notwithstanding a continuing sense of Brazil's cultural peripherality that continued into the following centuries, in diplomatic terms, Brazil had become decidedly less peripheral as the decades proceeded. When Machado published *Dom Casmurro* in 1899, it was forty-three years after the conclusion of the Crimean War but just twenty-seven years before Brazil, as a member of the League of Nations council, vetoed, in the service of "following its agenda" (Leuchers 123), the entry to the League of Germany. Germany was a power that, when Machado published the novel, would have seemed far above Brazil in world hierarchies. There is a sense in which Machado's Crimean War is a reference that anticipates Brazilian activity in the League, the Second World War, and, today, transnational groupings such as BRICS. Manduca's choice foreshadows a cosmopolitan world in which Brazil is a meaningful actor beyond its shores.

Schwarz, in a comment highly informative to the overall argument of this essay, has spoken of the reader's need to understand Machado's overall "composition" (*Periphery* 8). If we do this, Schwarz suggests, and "if we keep a certain distance," we can "begin to see the outlines of a social structure" (8). The distance involved in filtering the Crimean War through the viewpoints of Bento and Manduca stretches this distance into the semi-global and the cosmopolitan. But the circumspection, and consequent distance, as Schwarz indicates, is the key. Regarding the Crimean War, the narrator does not advise us what to think. The war and the two men's response to it as

proffered as a neutral datum, a mere citational instance. Antonio Candido spoke of the gap in Machado between “the real event and the imagined one” (Candido 112) concerning Bento’s imaginings about his wife’s infidelity. But the gap also operates as the actual event of the Crimean War, and its indexical significance to the two youthful friends are also two very different entities.

But how does the Crimean reference affect the narrative stance of *Dom Casmurro*? The Crimean War ended the year before 1857, the beginning of the action of the book per se—Casmurro’s move for Capitú, his mother’s insistence on his entering the priesthood. As a historical event in Casmurro’s trajectory, it exists just before time, just before what is important, what will be his joy and his downfall. As young men, Manduca and Casmurro were aware that in other circumstances they could fight in wars, but in this one their inclination and posture were merely academic.

The most ardent convictions in *Dom Casmurro* often turn out to be more tactical postures. For instance, there is a realization—perhaps the most fundamental reassessment that the reader must make in mid-course—that the mother does not want Bento to go into the priesthood. Perhaps it is because she has made a vow, fears the cost of retrenching her opinion once she has made it in the knowledge of others, but it becomes clear that the obstacle to his leaving the priesthood can be finessed rather than having to be uprooted at its source. Because what had seemed to be the deepest barrier to his happiness was not sincere, does Bento begin to suspect the sincerity of every other deeply held conviction? Because his mother did not mean what she said, does Bento suspect his wife and best friend of also prevaricating?

In this light, Manduca’s absolute profession of defiance against the Russians stands as an indubitable truth (why else would Manduca go to such lengths to hold it about such a peripheral issue?) and unalterable (because Manduca is safely dead, and his assertions are also his epitaphs.) But there is also a tactical aspect to Manduca’s choice. Part of its fervor is simply to mark out Manduca’s distinctiveness. But, more broadly, Machado was, through his portrayal of Manduca, seeking for himself, as author, an in-between place between the European and the non-European. Equally, Machado was writing out of a culture that, in one sense, was deeply Catholic but which, in another, was growingly anticlerical and positivist. If, as the line from *Resurrection* has it, the novel is secular, that secularity unfolded in a geopolitical context.

The Crimean War had a sense of the secular about it because two Christian nations fought another Christian nation in aid of a Muslim ally. European nations had allied with the Ottomans before, but in an age of print culture and a greater popular interest in foreign policy, this mattered more and testified to the erosion of Christianity as a principal force in the behavior of nations. If

nations were just contending in their interest, then, and if this process was accelerated by the rise of laissez-faire capitalism, what of the possibility of community among people? Casmurro's friendship with the dead Manduca becomes an issue when the reader realizes that Casmurro's inability to be happy has its source in a basic unease with other people. For much of the novel, his great dilemma is his mother's insistence that he goes into the priesthood and his attempts to evade this desire and yet not disappoint her. In the end, this leads to a sense of first, dissimulation, detachment, and a certain second-hand sense of the contentions and disputes of others. The cat-and-mouse game that Ezekiel watches has the same sense of distance as the Crimean War does for Brazil.

The name of Capitu (capital=Rio, Constantinople, but certainly not Asuncion) and Ezekiel, dying in Jerusalem, testify to a very specific sort of Christian transnationalism. This transnationalism is based on the fact that the vast majority of Christian adherents do not live anywhere near the Holy Land. Even if the novel's action were in Portugal, not Brazil, there would be a sense of transnational pilgrimage, as indeed occurs in Eça de Queirós's *The Relic*. Machado is writing at a time when pilgrimage to the Holy Land had become mixed with a certain sort of Orientalist tourism combined with a modern search for archaeological knowledge, so Ezekiel's trip is a "scientific" one (260), so Ezekiel visits Egypt as well as Palestine and Greece. The Crimean War was fought [partially] over the threat of Russian control of the holy Christian places in Jerusalem. Thus, the entire conflict—over and above the proximity of the Black Sea to the Mediterranean—had a metonymic relationship to the Holy Land. Crimea became a kind of substitute for the Holy Land, but Crimea would serve as the arena where the future fate of that land would be played out. This informs the byplay between the very local mentions of Rio's neighborhoods in Casmurro's life story and the exalted object of Ezekiel's pilgrimage.

Aside from being raced, the Crimean War reference is also gendered, as the war stands in the place of the typical Machadian situation of a woman either being or, more frequently imagined, as the focal point of a rivalry between two men. The surprisingly uninflected masculinity of designations of Machado as an experimental master, utterly in control of his oeuvre, manifesting a difficult and experimental but withal monologic stance that criticism exegesis can do little to other than admire and extol. The Crimean reference, and its manifold reverberations, can help disengage this sense,

While Schwarz would no doubt also see the Crimean reference as being as purely private, as he did those to Paraguay in Machado's oeuvre, and certainly in the iteration, it is just that, its privacy is a complex one. Manduca and Bento share a private affect over a public event, an affect that they could not share over a private event. This is not because its public dimension is trivialized or absent

of political torque so much that it is distant. The Crimean War is an event very far away towards which Bento and Manduca have only a stance of detached spectatorship. The Crimean War was, as a media event, not quite a global media event (partially because global media did not quite yet exist) and, as a war, not quite a total war. As Zulfikar Ghose puts it, it dominated news headlines at the time, “the issue most talked about in the papers” (113), but did not necessarily preoccupy readers outside of the direct combatants. K. David Jackson deftly defines the relationship between Bento and Manduca over Crimea as being “linked as adversaries” (31). Jackson’s comment both emphasizes the conflict between the two men but also understands that, in that disagreement, they are both invested in this distant foreign conflict.

Unlike in the Shakespearean examples, though, the true falling-out with Escobar is only posthumous. Previously, Casmurro was going to the brink of accusing his wife of infidelity and his son of not being his son, but, as in the example of not poisoning the dogs with meatballs, Escobar’s death—for which Casmurro is *not* liable in thought, word, or deed—is what tips the novel’s arc from contemplation of possibility into the rapidly unfolded full-bore tragedy of the ending. There had been incipient jealousy before in the narrative. When Escobar and Sancha have a daughter, the younger Capitu, he is resentful. But this potential grievance is alleviated by the birth of Ezekiel. Indeed, for seven-eighths of the novel, Casmurro has little to complain about, as every obstacle that stood in his way has dissolved. He marries the love of his life, and the exit from the priesthood is managed in a way that does not split his family, he becomes a father. He only begins to suspect Escobar destructively after the latter’s death. The dog’s “special smile” (210) causes Casmurro to reflect and thus immobilizes his will. Consequently, he does not follow through on his intention of poisoning him, which is contingent on the dog being alive.

Once Escobar is dead, there is no hope for a special smile. The friendship with Manduca, where the good memories only increase after the friend’s death, thus stands in a counterpoint. If, as Bill Marx puts it, Casmurro’s jealousy of Escobar ends in “near-dementia” (n. p.), the response to Manduca’s death stands as an instance of sanity and balance, albeit remote and minor. As the modern era accelerated and wars became more potentially destructive, the Crimean War also seemed quaint by comparison. Manduca’s choice—to support the Allies, who, despite their flaws, were the less menacing alternative in the conflict—was a choice that affirmed a sense of loyalty and principle. It fosters an affectionate memory for Casmurro, someone who ends up destroying his own life through his suspicion and is numbly indifferent to this destruction even at the end. Manduca’s choice can thus accentuate the novel’s critique of casmurraneity and give further insight into the ongoing interrogation

of Machado's own identity as an author, whose semi-global vista of the Crimean reference shows Machadian authorship as developing not just within a national but a cosmopolitan political frame.

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