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# Censorship and Morality: Machado de Assis, Émile Augier and the National Theater Institute

José Luís Jobim

*Este artigo pretende demonstrar que, no século XIX, censura e moralidade eram duas faces da mesma moeda, no Brasil e na França. Para isto, exploraremos uma faceta virtualmente inexplorada de Machado de Assis: a sua atuação como censor no Conservatório Dramático Brasileiro, instituição que pretendia conciliar uma função estética com a função moral e política, normalmente atribuída à censura. Visando contribuir para um estudo comparado da censura teatral como instituição, nosso foco principal incidirá tanto sobre o parecer de M. de A., relativo à apresentação da peça As leoas pobres, de Émile Augier e E. Foussier, no Brasil, quanto sobre os argumentos produzidos na França pelos próprios autores daquela peça, para se defenderem do veto da censura francesa.*

In the twentieth century, especially in countries such as Brazil, the work of the censor was linked frequently to the police, and was justified both as a supposed defense of “morality and public standards [*bons costumes*]” as well as an alleged protection of the public against “foreign ideologies.”

In the nineteenth century, however, one institution attempted to reconcile the censor’s moral (and political) function with an aesthetic one: the National Theater Institute. Perhaps this supposed aesthetic function explains why some of the most important writers of the nineteenth century participated in the Institute’s activities, including the writer who would become the most famous of his time, Machado de Assis (1839–1908).

Would it at the same time be possible to aspire to defend “morality and public standards” as well as “to stimulate and to guide the national talent for drama and its associated arts” (Sousa, *O teatro* 44), as the National Theater Institute proclaimed?

Examining the rulings of its most famous member, Machado de Assis, we can ascertain that in general his role as a moral censor triumphed over that of aesthetic guide, even though his rulings were more “liberal” than those of his colleagues on the Institute, and more liberal even than those of the French censors who rejected the play *Les lionnes pauvres* (*The Poor Lionesses*), by Émile Augier and Edouard Fournier, a play that was approved and praised by Machado. Because it passed through the hands of both the French and Brazilian censors, one can observe in their respective treatments of it the reasons given for their verdicts in order to note, among other things, how in the course of his work for the National Theater Institute Machado ended up adopting some of the very procedures condemned by Augier in his own statements on the function of the theater and the role of censorship in nineteenth-century France.

Clearly, when considering Machado’s work for the National Theater Institute, one cannot neglect to note that it occurred very early in his life. Machado was 23 years old when he became associated with the National Theater Institute and, while he was far from being the national celebrity that he would become in his later years, already he had embarked on a career as a theater critic, which perhaps explains why he was invited to join the institution.

In this essay, I will attempt to clarify, in a synthetic manner, both what the National Theater Institute attempted to be and what it in fact was, as well as the nature of Machado’s work for the organization.

## The National Theater Institute: A Historical Retrospective

Were one to want to define what the National Theater Institute was, one might state that it was the institution responsible for censoring theatrical productions during a large part of the nineteenth century. Yet this statement would not be entirely correct, since the Institute also attempted to be an agent for the cultivation and dissemination of proper aesthetic taste, as its Articles of Organization, approved on April 24, 1843, demonstrate.

In these articles the founders profess their desire “to promote drama studies and the betterment of the Brazilian stage in order that it become a school for public standards [*bons costumes*] and language,” establishing already in the first article that:

- 1.—The Theater Institute will have as its principal cause and primary goal—to stimulate and to guide the national talent for drama and its associated arts—to correct the vices of the Brazilian stage, insofar as this falls within its control—to impose its judgment on works, be they of national or of foreign origin, whether they have appeared on the stage already or aspire to offer themselves for public approval, and finally to conduct theatrical works

towards and introduce them to the great precepts of Art, by means of a discreet examination in which their defects are pointed out and attacked, and the methods for their correction indicated. (Sousa, *O teatro* 44)

The reference to “the vices of the Brazilian stage,” which in an environment of censorship might be read as referring simply and purely to “morality and public standards” (and which it later would), here ends up being nuanced by a declared desire to “conduct” theatrical productions to the “great precepts of Art” by means of the censors’ announced rulings. That is, the article makes manifest a desire to exercise a role in the work’s aesthetic character that is absolutely foreign to more recent censorship organizations.

In the document sent to the Emperor in order to plead for the approval of the Institute’s Articles of Organization, the following argument was produced:

Your majesty, the Theatrical Art is for certain one of the most beautiful and most useful, and the necessity of giving to it some direction in Brazil, that it may be conducive to the ends to which it is purposed for the reformation of customs [*costumes*], for the purity of the language and for the teaching of good taste, is so obvious that it does not require demonstration. (Brazil 1)

Two years later, Decree 425 of July 10, 1845, which created standards for censorship, established that

No play may be submitted to the chief of police for his approval [...] that is not accompanied by the ruling of the National Theater Institute, whatever be its verdict, without which the chief of police will not approve it. (Sousa, *O teatro* 55)

In other words, censorship was already a police matter, since, according to Article 11 of this decree, if the chief of police had not seen the play, the theater would be closed down. It means as well that the Institute served as an accomplice in that police action. Hence it is not surprising that, while it could count among its members literary figures of the caliber of Martins Pena, Araújo Porto Alegre and Machado de Assis, the Institute’s actions were profoundly marked by this complicit function.

## Machado’s Rulings<sup>1</sup> and Ideas Concerning the Theater

With regards to the rulings issued by Machado, one can ascertain that, while they certainly reflect his aesthetic concerns, such concerns end up being subordinate in relation to his opinion of the moral content of the plays. Yet it is important to delineate immediately two points that we will seek to develop in the course of our argument:

- 1) In presuming a moralizing function for the theater—which, in turn, necessitates that the theater be “moralized” as well—Machado adopts a point of view that is hardly his alone, but one from the French school of theatrical realism, which viewed the stage as a means for the dissemination of eighteenth-century bourgeois values.
- 2) Machado also believes in an aesthetic function for the Institute, which could imply, for example, the possibility of intervening in the development of playwrights by means of the opinions he issues in his role as a censor.

With these two points noted, let us enter into a lengthier argument and begin by saying that, in his career as a critic, Machado had already offered glimpses of his future as an arbiter. For, besides their artistic and literary concerns, the pieces of theater criticism that Machado de Assis had already published in the magazine *O Espelho* (*The Mirror*) revealed a preoccupation with the moral aspect of the plays, a fact that Raimundo Magalhães Júnior considers “most natural in a magazine destined to be read principally by young women and housewives” (114).

On December 16, 1861, responding to an attack by Antônio Joaquim de Macedo Soares, Machado reveals his ideas concerning the purpose of the theater:

It must insure that the public does not exit the theater without taking with them a severe and profound morality. Art alone, pure art, art proper, does not demand this in its entirety from the poet; but in the theater it is not enough to meet the conditions of art. (Magalhães Júnior 169)

Moreover, in order that one not think that Machado was expressing a singular, unique position on the matter, it is pertinent to remember, with João Roberto Faria, that the dramatic realism which originated in France took as one of its presuppositions the belief in the regenerative and moralizing force of the theater, placing it at the service of man’s virtue and duty, and using the stage as a pulpit on behalf of bourgeois ethical values (Faria *O teatro realista*). Faria calls attention to the expression “moral photography,” coined by Paul de Saint-Victor, observing that it applies perfectly to all realist comedies: “To depict reality, to critique it and to try to improve it by means of moralizing brushstrokes are the basic characteristics of this type of drama” (42). Thus, it is not surprising that Alexandre Dumas *fil*s, another exponent of the realist school, states: “All literature that does not have in view perfectibility, moralization, the ideal, and utility is, in a word, a rachitic and sickly, a still-born literature” (qtd. in Faria 42).

If we take as examples three texts published in 1859, texts in which a number of ideas concerning the theater and the National Theater Institute coalesce, we can better understand how it is that we find Machado at that date already expressing opinions similar to those that he would publish in the

future, in the years 1862–1864, when he served as a member of Theater Institute. In order to begin, he points out that “a brief examination of our artistic situation suffices for one to recognize that we are in our moral infancy,” and that the enterprise of dramatic art must have an objective:

Its initiative, then, must have one sole aim: education. To demonstrate to its initiates art’s truths and concepts; and to lead their unmoored and impoverished souls to the sphere of those concepts and those truths. (Assis 790)

In these texts, the moralistic presuppositions of the realist theater are essentially commandeered by Machado:

The theater is for the people what the chorus was for Ancient Greek theater: an impulse for morality and civilization. Now, one cannot moralize purely abstract facts for the benefit of a society; art must not lose its head in the infinite folly of ideal concepts, but rather identify itself with the foundation of the masses; it must copy, follow the people in their diverse movements, in the varied modes of their action.

To copy an existent civilization and to add to it one minute particle, this is one of the most productive forces upon which a society depends in its march towards mounting progress. (791)

In what is said in these texts with respect to the National Theater Institute, it is interesting to observe how Machado, prior to becoming one of its members, treats it. First, he establishes that the institution’s results in some ways conform to those that one essentially finds already being contemplated in the Articles of Organization. Nevertheless, he claims that, by merely fulfilling the first of its roles, the Institute yet leaves something to be desired:

There are, or ought to be, two goals for this institution: one moral and one intellectual. It fulfills the first by correcting the most indecent features of the dramatic conception; it attains the second by analyzing and judging the literary merit—of that same dramatic conception.

[...]

In fulfilling the first of the two goals to which it must attend, the Institute, instead of being constituted as a deliberative body, will become a simple machine, a common instrument, albeit one not entirely impotent, which reaches its judgments by tracing the implacable lines of the statute that serves as its standard.

To judge a composition by means of the offenses it commits against morality, against the laws and religion, is not to discuss its purely literary merit, its creative thought, the construction of its scenes, the design of its characters, the arrangement of its figures, its wordplay.

In the second instance, there is a need for more extensive knowledge, knowledge that can legitimate one’s intellectual authority. In the first, it

suffices simply to have half-a-dozen vestal virgins and two or three of those aristocratic women devoted to the king of Mafra. That would do it.

To judge the literary value of a composition is to perform a civilizing function, and at the same time to practice a spiritual right: it is to take upon one a less slavish role in favor of one with more initiative and deliberation. (795)

Machado's first ruling as a censor, in 1862, concerned the play, *Clermont ou a mulher do artista* (*Clermont or the Artist's Wife*). What initially has captured the attention of present-day academics is the complete lack of bibliographical references to the author of the play. Filling in this gap, I have discovered that it pertains to:

*Clermont ou une femme d'artiste*. Comédie-vaudeville en 2 actes, par MM. Scribe et Émile Vander-Burch. Paris: J.-M. Barba, 1838.—In—4<sup>o</sup>, paginé 713–736.<sup>2</sup>

This two-act play was staged for the first time at the *Gymnase dramatique* in Paris on March 30, 1838. In the first act we see the painter Clermont, who is married to a beautiful woman of noble birth, who in turn is coveted by the Viscount de Réthel. In order to provide her with the standard of living to which she is accustomed, Clermont works day and night, far beyond what his physical condition can tolerate. But when she discovers that he is sacrificing his health in order to provide her with luxury, Hermance, his wife, protests and proposes that they pay off their accumulated debts, including a promissory note for 20,000 francs held by the Viscount, by selling their possessions. Nevertheless, at the end of the first act, the painter loses his sight, supposedly from having overstrained it with excessive work.

When the second act begins, the audience is informed of a German doctor who can perform an operation to cure blindness, but that it costs a fortune; Clermont never would be able to pay such a price due to the fact that he can no longer paint. Yet his wife—whom he suspects has been cuckolding him with the Viscount—secretly dedicates herself to performing as an opera singer and obtains the money needed for the operation. And with the help of the Viscount himself!

In his ruling on the play, Machado comments not only on it but also on both the translation and the state of the Brazilian theater. With respect to the translation, he writes:

If the play itself is worthless, the translation has made it even worse, if this is possible. Not only does the construction of the sentences in Portuguese suffer from the influence of the original idiom, but even individual words are translated nonsensically. Among others, it occurs to me that the verb—to demand [*demandar*—was translated in its sense as to ask for [*pedir*], rather than as to ask [*perguntar*], which is the sense that properly suits the occasion (Act 2, Scene 6) [...]. (Sousa, "Machado de Assis" 178)

When one consults Clermont's speech ("I have so many things to ask you and to tell you . . ." ["*j'ai tant de choses à te demander et à te raconter . . .*" (Scribe 730)]), one can see that within the context of the play the verb *to ask* indeed would be the best option for the translator.

But Machado is not content to remain merely at the level of the text. In the course of issuing his opinion he takes the opportunity to exhort the government to take action:

*Clermont or the Artist's Wife* is one of those literary banalities that alone constitute the almost exclusive repertory of our theaters.

[. . .]

It is a pity that our theaters are nourished by such compositions, which lack the merest shadow of merit and are destined to pervert taste and to counter the true mission of the theater. It truly pains one to see such a state of affairs, to which the government could and should put an end by implementing reform that assigns to the theater its true place. (Sousa, "Machado de Assis" 178–179)

One can observe that, in exhorting the government to carry out "reform that assigns to the theater its true place," Machado in a certain manner echoes the purpose declared in the Theater Institute's Articles of Organization, which consisted of "to conduct theatrical works towards and introduce them to the great precepts of Art." However, neither "the great precepts of Art" nor theater's "true place" is made explicit, although each is employed as if its meaning were self-evident and agreed upon rather than something yet to be clarified. While it may well be that Machado and the other members of the Theater Institute consistently assumed that the meaning of such terms was unproblematic, one might also consider at least two other possibilities here. On the one hand, they may have understood that in each and every actual ruling the meaning of "the great precepts of art" or of "theater's true place" would be of necessity an issue for interpretation that could not be decided beforehand. But, on the other hand, they could have adopted the very openness of such terms' meanings as a kind of political strategy, knowing that, although there might be a general consensus at any particular time about the need for a set of "great precepts of art," this consensus would melt into thin air as soon as one tried to define exactly what the exact content of such "precepts" was. Such strategic ambiguity might result in a case in which two censors would issue differing opinions on a text while nevertheless employing the "same" terms (e.g., "the great precepts of Art" or "theater's true place") in their rulings, each of them operating under the sway of their own particular interpretation.

At any rate, the central challenge for the censors in general and for Machado in particular did not concern the aesthetic qualities of a play, as one can readily demonstrate. In concluding his ruling on *Clermont or the Artist's*



*Wife*, Machado unveils an argument that will resurface, with minor variations, in several of his subsequent opinions and that will make clear the subordinate status of any aesthetic criteria:

I truly regret having to give my approval to this composition because I understand that I am contributing to the perversion of the public's taste and to the suppression of the rules that ought to preside over a country's theater in order that it may become a force for civilization. But, since it does not transgress against the precepts of our law, I will not obstruct the staging of *Clermont or the Artist's Wife*, yet nonetheless I engrave upon it my literary condemnation and obligate the author and translator for the expenses.

Rº. 16 March 1862  
Machado de Assis  
(Sousa, "Machado de Assis" 179)

Hence, it becomes clear that "literary condemnation" is no impediment to the staging of a play. If any doubt may yet remain regarding this, Machado's opinion on the play *A caixa do marido e a charuteira da mulher* (*The Husband's Case and the Wife's Cigar Box*) should serve to resolve it.

The comedy in one act, *The Husband's Case and the Wife's Cigar Box*, modestly signed with three initials, seems to be a work of obscure paternity, which refuses to show itself and withdraws into mystery. Whoever reads the comedy sees immediately that it is a horrid translation from French, obviously distorted, lacking form in Portuguese or in any language whatsoever.

**It is called a comedy when it is a farce, according to the frontispiece and the context. It is a grotesque farce, without any style, its vulgarity contending with its tediousness. If literary censure were among my duties I would with certainty deny it my assent; but this not being the case, I judge that it can be presented in any theater.**

Rio, 12 January 1862  
Machado de Assis  
(Sousa, "Machado de Assis" 188–189; my emphasis)

In a ruling from January 8, 1863, in which he judges the dramas *Espinhas de uma flor* (*The Flower's Thorns*) and *O filho do Erro* (*The Child of Error*), Machado makes explicit his duty as a censor in a statement about the former play:

Despite all of the sympathy that these industrious youths inspire in me, I cannot grant the permission requested for this drama, whose author is attempting to acquire renown in the field of dramatic literature. I praise him for his efforts, applaud him for his successes, but it is not in my power to sacrifice my principles and duty.

Now duty mandates that all those ideas that might pervert good sentiments and twist the laws of morality be removed from the stage. (Sousa, "Machado de Assis" 191)

To emphasize the fact that it is not the play's literary quality that prevents its being performed but rather its "moral" quality, in the same ruling one can view the contrast between Machado's statements concerning the two dramas, *Espinhos de uma flor* (*The Flower's Thorns*) and *O filho do Erro* (*The Child of Error*). Of the second, Machado declares:

With regards to *The Child of Error*, if it is, literarily speaking, defective, it does not seem to me outside of the legal and moral prerequisites. I find that it can be performed. (Sousa, "Machado de Assis" 192)

Still, it is also important to point out that Machado tries to fulfill the role of aesthetic motivator and guide. His opinions frequently contain analyses of the texts he has read and observations concerning the style and technique of the authors evaluated, as well as, in the case of translated texts, praise for or emendations to the work of the translator. See, for example, his opinion of June 20, 1863:

I read the drama *The Iron Ring*, by Areires. It is yet another effort in our nascent dramatic literature. If it is not an absolutely complete work it testifies to the good qualities on the part of the author, and reveals a talent that lacks but the study of the masters and the reflection necessary for the reproduction of characters. These find themselves a bit confused, at times; at other times, a bit contradictory. The author's hand is not steady, and one easily sees that it vacillates often in certain poorly attempted and poorly executed scenes.

**Still the author has sufficient passion for giving life to his ideas; it remains for him to acquire the means to know how to employ it in such a way that it does not harm the effect and the verisimilitude. His dialogue is well constructed and almost always natural. The style is uneven and a bit refined, and it is not difficult to find certain expressions of less than pure taste.**

These observations are intended to point out in passing the author's mistakes, in order that he may avoid future error, and if I make them freely, I also make them with the conviction that the author's talent without a doubt can triumph over the present defects and consciously choose the road to progress. (Sousa, "Machado de Assis" 189; my emphasis)

In what follows I shall analyze more closely Machado's ruling on Émile Augier's *The Poor Lionesses* because it merits special attention, for reasons that will soon become clear.

## Machado, Augier and The Poor Lionesses

One might begin this section with some brief historical data about Émile Augier, yet such data would fail perhaps to supply us with the parameters by means of which his own epoch judged him. Thus, I prefer to begin here with the sketch that Gustave Vapereau wrote about him in his famous work,

which was published in several successive editions during the course of the eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

What most strikes one in Vapereau's commentary on Augier's plays is the topic of morality.<sup>4</sup> Here are a few examples:

On *La Cigüe* (*Hemlock*; 1844):

*Hemlock*, which is perhaps the author's most complete work, is, under the guise of an elegant pastiche of ancient customs, a moral lesson delivered against the egoistic indifference and decrepitude of today's youth.

On *L'aventurière* (*The Adventuress*; 1848):

[This play was rewritten in 1860] in order thereby to extract, with more interest, a more potent lesson. One observed in it a tendency towards that easily satisfied literary morality that rewards virtue as well as that exaltation of bourgeois customs that renders the poet so sympathetic.

On *Gabrielle* (1849):

The final verse, quite foreign to the plot and to the heroine's character, is acceptable as the moral and summation of the entire play:—"Oh, father to our family, oh poet, I love you!" (Vapereau 88–89)

It is important to note that the *Académie Française* awarded *Gabrielle* with the Montyon prize (shared with Joseph Autran's *La fille d'Eschyle* [*The Daughter of Aeschylus*]) and that in the following year Augier was decorated with the *Légion d'honneur*, just as he was made a member of the French Academy in 1858, the year in which *Les lionnes pauvres* premiered. On July 27, 1870, he was named a senator by imperial decree, "due to the services rendered by his literary productions" (Vapereau 90). While this decree had not yet been issued, one must still consider his future nomination along with the other indicators of his prestige and of the public's approval as a sure sign of his success.

Hence João Roberto Faria is certainly correct when he deems Augier, along with Ponsard, as one of the most important representatives of the *École du Bon Sens*:

In their plays, reason and duty, law and public conscience are highly exalted values. As opposed to the romantics, who by proclaiming the sovereign rights of passion exalted the individual and shook the foundations of the family, both [Augier and Ponsard] defended the superiority of social institutions, the family, and the collective interest. Generally, in their plays there is no room for extravagant emotions. Even in matters of love it is always the reason that controls the heart and prevents emotional explosions. Given such characteristics, the plays of Ponsard and Augier conquered the bourgeois public of their day, who saw their ethical values elegantly dramatized on the stage. (7–8)

In truth, Vapereau himself had already noted: “Mr. É. Augier, from his very beginnings, was considered to be one of the leaders of ‘l’école du bon sens’” (90).

Therefore, when Machado de Assis composed his ruling on *The Poor Lionesses* for the National Theater Institute he was commenting on one of the most prestigious authors of the time. Yet there remains another aspect that renders his ruling on the play even more pertinent here: the play served as the pivot in a struggle between its authors, Émile Augier and Edouard Fournier, and the French censors, who rejected it two times. Note how Machado adopts in his opinion a position diametrically opposed to that of the French censors:

I find that the comedy, *The Poor Lionesses*, by Émile Augier and Edouard Fournier, a translation of which I have before me, ought to obtain a license to be performed.

And if I may be allowed to adduce one consideration, I shall state that not only should plays such as this one always be granted license, but furthermore that it would be deplorable if a judge were led to render it interdict on account of his intolerance for the school.

The matter taken by the comedy at hand as its object for study is a fact that is all too true: venal adultery. Let us not be frightened by the phrase as it lies on the page. The chasteness of the language, the modesty of the situations, these challenge the most exacting spirit, and I myself, who am always disposed against contemporary portrayals of vice on the stage, do not find anywhere in its five acts a single point at which one might judge the play susceptible to modification.

The reason for this triumph by the authors of *The Poor Lionesses* is simple. Whenever a dramatic poet limits himself to the simple portrayal of virtue and vice in such a way that the former inspires sympathy and the latter horror, whenever there is present in the representation of his pieces the idea that the theater is a school for customs [*costumes*] and that in the audience there are chaste and modest ears listening, whenever the poet has become aware of this, then his works will be irreprehensible from a moral point of view.

Both from this point of view as well as from the literary, this play seems to me among the best of the modern theater. The conception, the development, the situations, all seem to me to be perfectly conveyed by the dramatic logic that so often is expelled from the stage in spite of the protests and clamor. The truth of its characters and the naturalness of its situations are I believe the principal qualities of this play, for whose performance a license I hereby grant, or rather, recommend, as befits my allotted duty.

Rio, 24 November 1862

Machado de Assis

(Sousa, “Machado de Assis” 188)

If above I stated that by releasing the play without any hesitation Machado adopts a position diametrically opposed to that of the French censors,

I must add here that the arguments he raises in favor of the work do not coincide with those of the French dramatist Augier. But let us proceed by stages.

First, the name of the play refers to the elegant women who would wear expensive and eccentric outfits in order to appear through the fashionable spots. They were known simply as *lionnes* (lionesses), when their husbands had the money to finance their luxury. When, however, their husbands lacked the necessary wealth they were called *lionnes pauvres* (poor lionesses) and made use of lovers to pay their bills. In this case, Séraphine is a “poor lioness” who is married to Pommeau, an honest and modest functionary. Pommeau’s daughter, Thérèse, is married to Léon, who is Séraphine’s lover. Bordognon, a wealthy and cynical *bon vivant*, is a friend of Léon, yet at the same time also wants to enter into the competition for Séraphine. The play’s subject, which Machado de Assis summarized as being one of “venal adultery,” intersects with the nineteenth-century bourgeois family’s body of values, which ends up being confirmed at the end of the play with a moral condemnation of Séraphine and Léon.

The first edition of the play in book form (1858) contains, just after the frontispiece, a dedicatory note of gratitude to “His Highness the Imperial Prince Napoleon,” which reads:

Without your noble intervention, *The Poor Lionesses* would not have seen the light of day.

This dedication is nothing more than a frail testimony of our gratitude.

It would be unworthy to offer it to you did it not contain a more fitting homage to Your Imperial Highness; yet our play offered you the opportunity to defend and to save on principle the freedom of art: it is art that we here place under your protection.<sup>5</sup>

Why begin the book with such a dedication? Because *Les lionnes pauvres* traveled a long road before arriving on the stage: upon first being presented to the censorship committee it was rejected. The authors then appealed to the presiding minister, under whose influence the play was granted a new examination, subsequent to the authors having made some alterations to the original version. When the censors again reiterated their prohibition, the minister declared himself powerless to release the work. At this point, Augier declares: “In order to escape from this situation, there remained for us no other alternative than the emperor’s prerogative and an appeal to his mercy” (Augier and Foussier IX). This tortuous path, recounted in the first edition, does not appear in the collected works of 1889, though both the dedication and the preface do.

In truth, the preface is of extreme importance since it both informs us about the era’s methods of censorship as well as produces a consistent

argument in opposition to those methods themselves. In it Augier begins by stating that, once the play had claimed victory in the trial before the public and in the press, he felt himself free to speak dispassionately of the obstacles that the work had had to overcome before it could reach its “natural judges,” the theatergoers.

He also declares that the obstinate resistance that the work encountered at the hands of the censorship committee was not an isolated event that one might simply have passed over unknowingly, for, he says: “It’s all part of one system” (“C’est tout un système”; Augier and Foussier VII). In the following passage he offers his opinion of the censors’ work:

In order to formulate succinctly the two branches of my thinking, the censor would fail his duty as much by disarming comedy as by allowing it to turn its weapons against society. (Augier and Foussier VII)

In addition, he argues that censorship worries only about preventing comedy from using its weapons *against* society, but not that it might serve as a weapon on society’s behalf.

This involves a peculiar contradiction, one that also may be observed among the majority of those who speak about comedy: they recognize the potential for theater to do harm, but refuse that it may do good. Augier ironizes this situation when he asserts that it is necessary to decide between, on the one hand, acknowledging its potential to do both good and ill and, on the other, denying it the potential to do either.<sup>6</sup> If the theater’s adversaries profess that it has never improved or reformed anyone, then, in order to be consistent, they must add that neither has it ever perverted anyone, that it is merely an “innocent game, a childish diversion over which the State need not exercise any control.”<sup>7</sup> Still, Augier states, if the State exercises this control it is because it does not view the matter in this way, and “it [the State] is correct” (VIII).<sup>8</sup>

Although he declares that he would prefer not to overestimate literature’s social role, the French playwright does believe that there lies within the structure of societies a kind of spinal cord as important for their general economy as is the spinal cord for the individual human: customs [*les mœurs*]. It is by means of these that nations are maintained, even more so than through their laws and constitutions. The proof of this lies in the fact that on the day following a revolution, during the law’s interregnum, customs are preserved. For customs seem to be self-sufficient; they elude the government’s actions, and there is no decree or order that can reform or transform them.<sup>9</sup>

Augier thinks that, since in the case of any “error” on the part of the censors the blame would fall squarely upon them, they consequently always choose prohibition whenever there is any doubt or ambiguity. He also disputes the censors’ goal of preventing the theater from revealing the vices of

society by declaring that, if the mere representation of iniquities gave rise to more iniquities, then the *Gazette des tribunaux* (*The Court Gazette*)—in which the most vile crimes being tried in the courts were put on display, divulging even the criminals' methods and thus enabling their imitation—would be worse.

In fact, Augier's position on this issue is expressed in the play itself through the character of Pommeau:

SÉRAPHINE, keenly to Bordognon:

Will you be going to the *Gymnase* next Friday, Sir Frédéric?

BORDOGNON:

If they allow it, ladies, we shall go. I have a box. But you do not know what you will be exposing yourselves to . . . the play, it is said, is a bit risqué!

POMMEAU:

Bah! This spectacle is not fit for young ladies.

THÉRÈSE:

But there are certain social ills that it would be wiser to have hidden.

POMMEAU:

So that gangrene can infect them? Absolutely not! Expose them to the light of day, but with a red hot iron. The true function of comedy is not to encourage vice by keeping it secret, but to denounce it by unmasking it. (Augier and Foussier 16)<sup>10</sup>

What danger could the censors see in the fact that the theater gathers together ideas that “are floating in the air”? Would an illness not be already halfway cured when its location, its causes and its effects have been identified? (Augier and Foussier X).

Augier argues that the censors' assignment is simple and clear: to prevent the theater from offending the public's taste and from speaking of political matters, the first task being related to “decency” and the second to “public order.”<sup>11</sup> However, the French dramatist also believes that the censors have ended up extrapolating from this role:

As protectors of decency, they meddle in questions of morality and philosophy; as protectors of the public order they no longer allow one to whistle and hiss from the seat rows; they believe that they are responsible for the play's lapses, and from this responsibility they create the right to collaboration, revising the style, deleting certain words that have incurred their disfavor, giving advice *in the interest of the work*, imposing denouements at their own whim . . . and what denouements! (Augier and Foussier XI-XII)<sup>12</sup>

Augier's insights on censorship and censors of his era having been presented, a curious question now arises: might Machado in his work as a censor have engaged in some of the very procedures that Augier condemned? We will see in the following.

## Machado as Textual Arbiter and Censor

Machado de Assis, as an arbiter for the Institute, indeed does adopt some of the procedures against which Augier protests: the revision of an author's style, the suppression and substitution of words and the imposition of different denouements. Of his stylistic revisions I have spoken already, so that it suffices here to give examples of the other practices.

- 1) The deletion of words: In his ruling on the comedy entitled *Finalmente* (*Finally*) of March 20, 1862, Machado prescribes:

My scruples lead me to advise the deletion of an utterance of Azevedo's in the second scene. It is the following response to the servant: "She said that the rosemary would help my head . . . what a bitter joke!"

The phrase by itself contains nothing reprehensible; yet if we recall that Azevedo is convinced that Augusto's bouquet of flowers was sent to his wife we will find the utterance equivocal. (Sousa, "Machado de Assis" 179)

- 2) Alterations to the denouement and to the body of the text: In his ruling on the original Portuguese drama by Cesar de Lacerda entitled *Mistérios sociais* (*Social Mysteries*) of July 28, 1862, Machado writes:

In the denouement of the play, Lucena (the protagonist) marries a baroness. Philosophical theory does not recognize any difference between two individuals such as these who possess virtues to the same degree; however, given the conditions of a society such as ours, this manner of concluding the play ought to be altered. Two expedients present themselves for the removal of the difficulty: first is to not enact the wedding; yet in this case there would have to be a substantial revision of the role of the baroness, the deletion of entire scenes, up to the point that the figure of the baroness itself would become useless in the course of the action. I deem the second expedient better and easier: the viscount, father of Lucena, would sell into Mexico his lover and their son, free persons; this touch would render the viscount's act more repulsive; Lucena by law would be made a slave forever. This expedient is simple. In the penultimate scene and on the penultimate page, Lucena, following his line, "It is still not finished," would say: "A letter from my mother informed me that we were, before the law, free, and that between her prostitution and slavery she chose to keep silent and submit to that slavery into whose irons my father had cast her."

The other changes that I judge ought to be made affect not the action but the dialogue; I have marked them on the play in pencil. On page 39 following these words of Lucena: "the lack of true dignity," add: "of slaves." On page 78 another deletion was marked. On page 136 there must be a substantial deletion, and the dialogue should be adjusted in the following way: After Lucena says: "payment for part of the robbery," add: "Among these objects there were



some slaves.” The phrase written on page 74 ought to be substituted for this one: “Hello, we have a woman!” (Sousa, “Machado de Assis” 187)

Thus, due to everything that has been noted during the course of this investigation, one cannot help but point out that, while it may be an aspect of his career that has been studied very little, Machado de Assis’ work for the National Theater Institute certainly warrants greater attention. This is especially true when one studies them from within a comparative historical perspective as I have tried to do in this essay.

From within this perspective, one can conclude that the practices of censorship found in France and Brazil in the nineteenth century shared at least two important points of contact: first, the marked preoccupation with “morality and public standards”; second, the controversy over just what was acceptable within the parameters established by the definitions of these two terms. Despite the fact that Machado de Assis and Émile Augier found themselves not only in different countries but also in quite divergent positions (the former as a censor and the latter as a censored author), it is interesting to observe that both had as their goal the public staging of the play *The Poor Li-onesses*. Due to this common desire, both were required to produce justifications for its approval by their respective national censors. Machado had to construct generic arguments that would serve to confirm that the play would not offend the morals and public standards of Brazil. In France, Augier presented arguments of the same nature, and yet, unfortunately for him, Machado was not a member of the French censorship board. The history of the successive, and ultimately rejected, attempts and appeals made by Augier, as well as the play’s ultimate liberation by the King of France himself prove the difficulty of achieving any minimal consensus on what was acceptable in terms of morality and public standards.

Translated by Mark Streeter

## Notes

1. The passages cited here containing the rulings of Machado de Assis appear in conformance with the edition of Galante de Sousa (1956).
2. I found the volume referred to here in the François Mitterrand Library (Paris). For interested researchers, the library’s reference number for the book is: BN, Impr. [yf-1113] (36).
3. Editions of Vapereau’s text were published in: 1858 [1st ed.], 1861, 1863, 1865,

1870, 1873, 1880, 1881, 1882, 1886, 1893, and 1895. I have used the 1880 edition. See the Works Cited for complete bibliographical information.

4. At least until 1862, the year of Machado's ruling on the translated version of *Les lionnes pauvres* (*The Poor Lionesses*).

5. This dedication was maintained, as was the preface to the first edition to which I had access in the François Mitterand Library, at least until the edition of the complete works (1889) that I possess, which attests to the importance that Augier attributed to both.

6. "Ils lui concèdent pleinement la puissance de faire le mal; ils lui refusent celle de faire le bien. Il faudrait choisir cependant et les lui reconnaître ou les lui dénier toutes deux" (Augier and Foussier VII).

7. "Un jeu innocent, un divertissement puéril sur lequel l'État n'aurait pas de surveillance à exercer" (VIII).

8. "Or, puisqu'il en exerce une, et tres active, c'est qu'il ne voit pas les choses ainsi, et il a raison" (VIII).

9. "Je ne voudrais pas exagérer le rôle social de la littérature; mais il y a dans la structure des sociétés une charpente intérieure aussi importante à l'économie générale que la charpente osseuse à celle de l'individu: ce sont les mœurs. C'est par là que les nations se maintiennent, plus encore que par leurs codes et leurs constitutions. Nous en avons eu la preuve au lendemain des révolutions, pendant l'interrègne des lois. Mais les mœurs semblent ne relever que d'elles-mêmes; elles échappent à l'action gouvernementale; il n'est décret ni ordonnance qui puisse les réformer ou les transformer" (VIII).

10. It is important to note that in the 1889 edition of the complete works all reference to the theater's function was suppressed, so that the scene read:

SÉRAPHINE, vivement à Bordognon

*Est-ce que vous allez au Gymnase, vendredi prochain, monsieur Frédéric? . . .*

BORDOGNON

*Si vous le permettez, mesdames, nous irons. J'aurai une loge. (À Thérèse.) Après? C'est tout.*

SÉRAPHINE

*Ah! J'aime tant les premières représentations! C'est si difficile d'y avoir des places! Nous irons, n'est-ce pas, monsieur Bordognon? Tant pis pour Thérèse.*

POMMEAU

*Tu abuses, ma chère amie. (À Bordognon.) En tous cas, il est bien entendu . . .*

BORDOGNON

*Laissez donc, monsieur Pommeau, Qui est-ce qui paye à une première? Les malheureux! . . . Est-ce convenu, mesdames?*

THÉRÈSE

*Pour moi, je me récus; après une nuit passée au bal . . .*

POMMEAU

*Nous sommes gens de revue, d'ailleurs. (À Thérèse.) Tu nous quittes? Tu n'attends pas Léon? (16)*

11. "Voilà une commission chargée d'empêcher le théâtre d'offenser la pudeur de l'auditoire et de parler des affaires politiques, en un mot de lui faire respecter la décence et l'ordre public: ce sont là des attributions simples et nettes" (XI).

12. Augier also gives examples of the pathetic attempts to intervene in the text of *Les lionnes pauvres*. See pp. XI-XII.

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