

THE INQUISITION THEME IN MACHADO DE ASSIS'S POETRY:
A READING OF THE POEM "A CRISTÃ NOVA" ("THE NEW-CHRISTIAN")

*Temáticas da Inquisição na poesia de Machado de Assis:
Uma leitura do poema "A cristã nova"*

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ABSTRACT: There are few in-depth studies about Machado de Assis's relation to the Inquisition theme and to Jewish subjects. If we focus on his poetry, we shall find some poetries related to Jewish matters and the Holy Office, including the long poem titled "A cristã-nova" ("The New-Christian"), which this paper aims to analyze. My reflections are primarily based on the studies by Cláudio Murilo Leal, Mário de Andrade, Anita Novinsky, Francisco Bethencourt, Lina Gorenstein, Ricardo Forster.

KEYWORDS: Machado de Assis. Poetry. Inquisition. Holy Office. "A cristã-nova" ("The New-Christian").

RESUMO: Há poucos estudos mais densos sobre a relação de Machado de Assis com as temáticas da Inquisição e com os assuntos judaicos. Se fizermos um recorte apenas na lírica machadiana, encontraremos algumas poesias que estão relacionadas com as questões judaicas e com o Santo Ofício; dentre elas, o longo poema intitulado "A cristã-nova", o qual pretendemos analisar neste artigo. Nossas reflexões estarão ancoradas principalmente nas pesquisas de Cláudio Murilo Leal, Mário de Andrade, Anita Novinsky, Francisco Bethencourt, Lina Gorenstein, Ricardo Forster.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Machado de Assis. Poesia. Inquisição. Santo Ofício. "A cristã-nova".

Anita Novinsky is perhaps one of the first researchers of the Holy Office to observe the proximity of Machado de Assis with the Jewish matters, especially when it comes to the Inquisition. According to her, there are few in-depth studies on how the author of *The*

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Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas related to issues involving both the New-Christians and the inquisitorial courts. Anita Novinsky (2005, p. 23) draws the attention to the fact that “no single case of an exhaustive analysis about his relation to the Jews’ history and fate is to be found in any of the millions of pages that have been written on Machado de Assis”¹.

In fact, if we turn only to Assis’s poetry, for instance, we shall find three poems related to the Jewish matters and the Inquisition: “Antônio José,” “Espinosa,” and “The New-Christian”. The first one is a tribute to the Portuguese-Brazilian playwright Antônio José da Silva, the Jew. In Almeida Pereira’s (2012, p. 1) perspective, we can perceive the very first seeds of Assis’s irony, ambiguity and paradox in these intriguing verses, especially when the poet addresses the contradictory existence of the Jews. In a short one-stanza poem that reminds a haiku, Assis summarizes the life and the tragic death of this playwright who made the Portuguese smile but died crying at the age of 34 after being sentenced to death by burning in an act of faith in 1739:

Antônio José
(October 21st, 1739)

Antônio, the wisdom of the Scripture
Claims there are for the human creature
A time to smile and a time to cry
Like there is a sun in the sunset and at dawn
You, blood of Ephraim and Issachar,
have smiled, but now bemoans. (ASSIS, 1994, p. 162-163).²

The beautiful sonnet “Espinosa” is considered of “excellent quality” by Manuel Bandeira (1994, p. 11), or as good as the best short stories and novels written by Machado de Assis. It mentions the philosopher Espinosa, son of Portuguese Jews who had migrated to the Netherlands, fleeing from the Inquisition. In the second stanza, Assis alludes to the religious intolerance faced by the author of *Ethics*, who started polishing glasses to survive after being persecuted and convicted by heresy, banned from synagogues, churches and intellectual circles: “Let agitations and fights here outside resonate / Let the aspartic breath of winter hiss; You work, you think, you accomplish” (ASSIS, 1994, p. 163).

¹ Original: “nas milhares de páginas que já se escreveu sobre Machado, uma análise exaustiva sobre o seu envolvimento com a história e o destino dos judeus”.

² All poem translations in this article are free and content-oriented.

Original: “Antônio José / (21 de outubro de 1739) / Antônio, a sapiência da Escritura / Clama que há para a humana criatura / Tempo de rir e tempo de chorar / Como há um sol no ocaso, e outro na aurora. / Tu, sangue de Efraim e de Issacar, / Pois que já riste, chora” (ASSIS, 1994, p. 162-163).

The poem “The New-Christian”, the focus of this article, also alludes to the religious intolerance faced by a Hebrew family – “New-Christians” tortured by visitors of the Holy Office in Colonial Brazil. “The New-Christian” is part of the book *Americanas*, published for the first time in 1875. It addresses relevant romantic topics, such as Indigenism, as well as other topics “related to representation of the 19th-century Brazilian reality,”³ as pointed out by Marina Grandolpho (2014, p. 9).

In fact, we do not find in *Americanas* only verses dedicated to the first inhabitants of Brazil, as in “Potira,” “Niani,” and “Visão de Jaciúca”. There are also stanzas both for the female household slave Sabina and for the Jew Angela, as well as tribute poems for both the poet Gonçalves Dias and the patriarch José Bonifácio.

I concur with Fabiana Gonçalves (2015, p. 87) when she states that *Americanas* has traits of “a certain instinct of nationality, reflecting a desire of (the poet) to create a more independent literature” despite its elements of Indianism that follow the romantic tradition based on the model provided by poets Basílio da Gama and Gonçalves Dias. Assis himself claimed in his famous essay “Literatura brasileira: Instinto de nacionalidade” that the Brazilian letters could not be only related to Indianist elements, as everything is a “matter for poetry, provided that it brings the conditions of the beauty or the elements that compose it” (ASSIS, 1994, p. 802). In the first edition of *Americanas*, Assis also warns that “one should not conclude that everything is about our aborigines”⁴ (ASSIS, 1875, p. V).

Within a miscellany of topics that bring on those “conditions of the beauty”, which are significant to Machado de Assis and comprehend from Amerindians to Panegyrics to Gonçalves Dias and José Bonifácio, we find in *Americanas* the instigating poem “A Cristã-nova” [free translation: “The New-Christian”]. It tells the sad story of the Hebrew Angela, alongside the disappointments of her fiancé and the distress of her father, who was persecuted by inquisitors.

This long poem, or rather poem/short story, is divided into two parts: 9 stanzas in the first part, and 19 in the second. Resulting from the first phase of the author, it is, in Mario de Andrade’s (2002, p. 116) words, “a long and detailed technical learning”⁵. The stanzas contain

³ Original: “relacionados a caracteres de representação da realidade brasileira oitocentista”.

⁴ Original: ““e deve entender que tudo o que aqui vai seja relativo a nossos aborígenes”.

⁵ Original: “como um longo e minucioso aprendizado técnico”

hexasyllabic and decasyllabic blank verses, with varied rhythmic marking, which points to the “narrative vocation of the future author of ‘Quincas Borba’, an aspect that would become a constant in his poetic work”⁶ (LEAL, 2008, p. 17).

The very epigraph that introduces the poem is a significant indication of the tragedy that will unfold before the reader's eyes. Assis seeks in the Bible, precisely in the prophetic books, a link for such a narrative poetry. The prophet Nahum's (3:10) vaticinations of the Assyrian empire's tyranny against the Hebrews, “Yet was she carried away, she went into captivity”⁷ (King James Bible version), feature as a powerful metaphor to emphasize the millenary torment and wander of the Jews in foreign lands. For Audrey Miasso (2016, p. 30), a pioneer researcher of the epigraphs in Assis's poetry, this biblical sentence “not only anticipates Angela's captivity but also holds resemblance to the poem in the fight between nations”⁸.

In the first part, we are introduced to two important characters: the New-Christian Angela and her old widower father, who is described as a melancholic man, a skeptic long-bearded Jew, who, with “eyes staring the sky”⁹, evokes the “dark solitude of old Palestine”¹⁰ (ASSIS, 1994, p. 110). Moon bathing, the old man hears the sounds of the Guanabara sea, which makes him reflect sadly on the ruins of his ancestors' old land. Assis creates a gloomy atmosphere when he alludes to the second Jewish diaspora (ca. 70 A.D., when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem, and Jewish families dispersed worldwide):

A prophet in the spirit revolved
The misfortune of homeland. How remote
That holy land of his parents,
How different from this one where he's lived
His best days! Vague and sweet,
This moonlight does not light the sterile
Mountains, not even the last ruins.
Nor the desert plains, nor that
Warm silence of the region that once was

⁶ Original: “a vocação narrativa do futuro autor de ‘Quincas Borba’, vertente, aliás, que se tornaria uma constante ao longo de sua obra poética”.

⁷ In Machado's epigraph: “essa mesma foi levada cativa para uma terra estranha”.

⁸ Original: “não apenas antecipa o cativo de Ângela, mas se assemelha ao poema na luta entre nações”.

⁹ Original: “de olhos fitos no céu”.

¹⁰ Original: “solidões sombrias da velha Palestina”.

And that history has enshrouded¹¹ (ASSIS, 1994, p. 110)

However beautiful the moonlight is in Rio de Janeiro, it is not the moonlight that bathes the ruins of old Jerusalem, which “history has enshrouded”. The old father, with his silent reminiscence, represents a hundred of exiled Jews who came to Brazil in the colonial time, most of them compulsorily converted into Christianity. Historian Arnold Wiznitzer (1966, p. 1) explains that most of them “were Crypto-Jews, who fearful of being found by the secret agents of the Inquisition, would practice Jewish rites in secret”¹².

Angela is introduced in the fourth stanza as a loving, gentle daughter. Born in Brazil, probably after her parents had fled from the Portuguese Inquisition, she was baptized by water and compared to the sexy Shulamite, “the flower of Canticles” and to the pretty Ruth “before the rich Boaz” (ASSIS, 1994, p. 111). Yet, however adorned by these emphatic biblical metaphors, Angela always holds, just like her father, the complex hybrid identity of a New-Christian:

Seated
 At the old man's feet was the loving daughter,
 As pretty as the flower of Canticles,
 Like the rose of the fields. The head
 the young lady lays down in her father's knees,
 And she lets the thought slither
 Down the river of the long hopes
 And enamored dreams. Black eyes
 Between barely closed
 Eyelashes extend to the mountain chain that cuts
 The sky afar. Brunette is the beautiful
 Slightly livid face. More beautiful,
 Not sweeter was the splendid Ruth
 before the rich Boaz, compared to this virgin
 Flower that Israel sprouted from the ancient log
 Blushed by the juvenile America sun¹³ (ASSIS, 1994, p. 111)

¹¹ Original: “Um profeta no espírito volvera / As desgraças da pátria. Quão remota / Aquela de seus pais sagrada terra, / Quão diferente desta em que há vivido / Os seus dias melhores! Vago e doce, / Esse luar não alumia os serros / Estéreis, nem as últimas ruínas. / Nem as ermas planícies, nem aquele / Morno silêncio da região que fora / E que a história de todo amortalaria”

¹² Original: “era de cripto-judaizantes, os quais, temerosos de serem descobertos pelos agentes secretos da Inquisição, praticavam em segredo os ritos judaicos”.

¹³ Original: “Sentada / Aos pés do velho estava a amada filha, / Bela como a açucena dos Cantares, / Como a rosa dos campos. A cabeça / Nos joelhos do pai reclinava a moça, / E deixa resvalar o pensamento / Rio abaixo das longas esperanças / E namorados sonhos. Negros olhos / Por entre os mal fechados / Cílios estende à serra que recorta / Ao longe o céu. Morena é a face linda / E levemente pálida. Mais bela, / Nem mais suave era a formosa Rute / Ante o rico Boaz, do que essa virgem, / Flor que Israel brotou do antigo tronco, / Corada ao sol da juvenil América”

While such a flower from Israel that grew in the tropical soil of “juvenile America” allowed herself to be taken by her “enamored dreams,” her old father would read the Torah, or that holy work that he deemed as “the ultimate book of all” (ASSIS, 1994, p. 114). In times of persecution and accusation, the old Jew knew that one should best remain low profile. Prohibited books would be read clandestinely in the privacy of the home, far from the others’ eyes. This rebel gesture was also a moment of reasserting his Jewish identity, especially when he recited his daughter the famous Psalm 137, also known as “The canticle of the exiled”. In addition to telling the forced Jewish migration, these verses could be considered as an allegory of the Wandering Jew or of the exiled heretic, the one of no fixed abode, convicted to wander perpetually “in land of bitter, tough exile” (ASSIS, 1994, p. 114) until the end of times.

The Wandering Jew motif is part of Assis’s inquietude. In 1896 he published the short story “Viver”, whose tragical plot involving the castigation of the shoemaker convicted by Christ to perpetual wander is, according to Jiuvan Silva (2017, p. 1), “a dialogue of conceptual, biblical and philosophical density between Prometheus and Ahasverus, [which] exposes the corners of human condition...”

Assis adapts Psalm 137 (attributed to prophet Jeremiah) in 11 beautiful sextets, as if he would recreate another provoking poem inside the “New-Christian”, in an intense dialogue with the Old Testament. I register here only the first four stanzas:

Along the rivers of the cursed land
Of Babylon, one day we sat
Missing loving Zion.

The harps in willows we hanged
And when remembering the extinct days
Into tears we burst.

Those who gave us raw agonies
From captivity, there they asked us
About our ancient harmonies.

And we would say to those who spoke:
How in land of bitter, tough exile
Sing the hymns that praised the Lord?¹⁴ (ASSIS, 1994, p. 114)

¹⁴ Original: “Junto aos rios da terra amaldiçoada / De Babilônia, um dia nos sentamos, / Com saudades de Sião amada. / As harpas nos salgueiros penduramos, / E ao lembrarmos os extintos dias / As lágrimas dos olhos desatamos. // Os que nos davam cruas agonias / Do cativo, ali nos perguntavam / Pelas nossas antigas harmonias. // E dizíamos nós aos que falavam: / Como em terra de exílio amargo e duro / Cantar os hinos que ao Senhor louvavam?”

We should remember that Machado de Assis was not only a good connoisseur of the Portuguese poet Camoës, who was also inspired by Psalm 137 to compose the famous stanzas of “Sôbolos rios que vão” [free translation: “On the rivers that go”], but also a curious and perspicacious reader of the Bible. Upon studying the hundreds of books from Machado de Assis's library, Jean-Michel Massa (2001, p. 41) lists an 1866 volume of the Bible “containing the Old and New Testaments translated into Portuguese based on the Vulgate by Antonio Pereira de Figueiredo.”¹⁵ Assis was also interested in the Scriptures poetry and applied references, allegories and adaptations of biblical verses to various parts of his literary work. Some examples are the poems “O dilúvio”, “O profeta”, “Fé”, “Caridade”, “A morte no calvário” and the beautiful poem entitled “Soneto”, in which he makes an interesting adaptation of excerpts from the Book of Job, as in this tercet that closes the poem: “Where were you, when all was shapeless? What do you know of the mysterious tie / Which unites what lives to what sleeps perpetually?”¹⁶ (ASSIS, 2008, p. 733).

Turning back to “The New-Christian”: in the second part of this long narrative, we are introduced to the brave soldier Nuno, Angela's fiancé. He is described as fearless, a combatant who

Flees from the home of peace
Hope, fortune, love, and homeland
Take him to combat. In the veins
Alive unquiet blood runs
As if anxious to run through both
The beautiful land and the longed fiancée¹⁷ (ASSIS, 1994, p. 119)

After bravely fighting against the French enemies who had invaded Guanabara Bay, Nuno has high hopes of going back to his “longed fiancée”. However, the joy of seeing Angela again soon gives place to an incommensurable displeasure, as his father-in-law unfortunately falls prey to the Holy Office:

In her and in the old man lays Nuno his eyes
And disturbed he asks, “What bold
Arm threatens your life?” Hollow,

¹⁵ Original: “contendo o Velho e o Novo Testamento, traduzida em português, segundo a vulgata latina, por Antônio Pereira de Figueiredo.”

¹⁶ Original: “Onde eras tu, quando era tudo informe? / Que sabes tu do misterioso laço / Que une o que vive ao que perpétuo dorme?”

¹⁷ Original: “Foge à estância da paz / Esperança, fortuna, amor e pátria / a guerrear o levam. Já nas veias / o vivo sangue irrequieto pulsa / como ansioso de correr por ambas / A bela terra e a suspirada noiva”

A voice answers him: "The Holy office!"
 The lad turns his face
 And the melancholic aspect
 Of two bailiffs all his blood
 In the veins froze¹⁸ (ASSIS, 1994, p. 122-123)

Not only was Assis a great connoisseur of Bible narratives and Psalms, but also an attentive reader of the Portuguese Inquisition history and the works of the Holy Office in Brazil. His library features works by Alexandre Herculano, who in various moments addresses the Inquisition's long arm in the persecution against heretics in Brazil. It also features *Revista Trimestral de História e Geografia* and *Revista do Instituto Histórico e Geográfico do Brasil* (MASSA, 2001), which report the policing of Christian purity by the Portuguese Inquisition in Brazil. As we can notice, Assis's poem alludes to "two bailiffs" of the Holy Office: truculent men of "hollow" voice tasked to "report, arrest, seizure the goods and send to the Kingdom the suspects of crimes condemned by the Saint Inquisition"¹⁹ (MOTT, 2010, p. 24). Francisco Bethencourt comments that the bailiff position was highly sought after, despite its primary requisite that the candidate's family tree had no contamination by Moors, Jews or heretics up to the seventh generation. It was well paid and provided some social ascension to the poorest in the Portuguese population. Furthermore, the position was hereditary: "the son, nephew, son-in-law applies to succeed the late father, uncle, father-in-law in the bailiff title, a phenomenon that is homologous to transmitting inferior paid positions in courts"²⁰ (BETHENCOURT, 2000, p. 146). Hence the ferocity and the carefulness in their performance, of which Assis was well aware. In the 15th stanza, one of the bailiffs prevents the old Jew from properly saying goodbye to his loving daughter before they tie his hands:

A bailiff intercepts
 His last goodbye: "Let's go, it's time!"
 Resigned, the poor man to his breast tightens
 His daughter, and all his heart in a kiss

¹⁸ Original: "Nela e no velho fita Nuno os olhos, / E agitado pergunta: "Qual ousado / Braço lhe ameaça a vida?" Cavernosa / Uma voz lhe responde: "O Santo ofício!" / Volve o mancebo o rosto / E o merencório aspecto / De dous familiares todo o sangue / Nas veias lhe gelou."

¹⁹ Original: "denunciar, prender, sequestrar os bens e embarcar para o Reino os suspeitos enquadrados no rol de crimes do conhecimento da Santa Inquisição"

²⁰ Original: "'o filho, o sobrinho, o genro apresenta a candidatura para suceder ao pai, ao tio, ao sogro falecido com o título de familiar, fenômeno que é homólogo à transmissão dos cargos inferiores, remunerados, dos tribunais".

He gave to her, and he starts to walk²¹ (ASSIS, 1994, p. 123)

Although Colonial Brazil had no official establishment of the Portuguese Inquisition (including trials and deaths by burning), the Holy Office visited the colony three times. The first and most known of these inspections was when inquisitor Heitor Furtado de Mendonça arrived in Bahia in 1591. The second took place in 1618, with Marcos Teixeira in Bahia. The third one occurred in 1627, with inquisitor Luis Pires da Veiga in Rio de Janeiro. According to Lina Gorenstein (2005, p. 68), several Jews passed by Rio de Janeiro or lived there in the first half of the 17th century “fleeing from the Inquisition or the Dutch invasions: the city represented a safe haven for them. The inquisitor’s arrival in 1627 should have scared the New-Christian community...”²² This fright, this despair or the veiled fear of the hard-faced Inquisition bailiffs was the feeling felt by all those involved in Machado de Assis’s poem. While “the blood in [Nuno’s] vein froze” and Angela sobbed and had her body agitating in a “continuous tremor,”²³ the desolated Jew, in addressing young Nuno, says with a “not weak but slow voice”²⁴:

“See? All the courage, all the love in your chest
Silenced you. All you can is lament me,
Never save me. Prison awaits me,
And the bonfire perhaps, it is time to serve it”²⁵ (ASSIS, 1994, p. 123)

The old Jew, even knowing that nobody could save him from the claws of the Holy Office, not even his son-in-law, a brave soldier, begs him to take care of his “afflicted daughter”²⁶ as both a “father and husband”²⁷ (ASSIS, 1994, p. 123). The ill-fated old man notices that it would be useless to fight against the power of an institution that would persecute bigamous, Moors, Lutheran, sodomites, wizards, witches and mostly Jews in the name of the integrity of the Catholic faith. As a matter of fact, the secret Judaism of the New-Christians, also known as Crypto-Judaism, was, in Ronaldo Vainfas’s (1997, p. 10) words, “undoubtedly the greatest

²¹ Original: “Um familiar lhe corta / O adeus último: “Vamos: é já tempo”! / Resignado o infeliz, ao seio aperta / A filha, e todo o coração num beijo / Lhe transmitiu, e a caminhar começa”

²² Original: “seja fugindo da inquisição ou das investidas holandesas: a cidade representava um porto seguro para eles. A chegada do visitador em 1627 deve ter assustado a comunidade cristã-nova...”

²³ Original: “tremor contínuo”.

²⁴ Original: “não frouxa, mas pausada, fala”

²⁵ Original: “— Vês? Todo o brio, todo o amor no peito / Te emudeceu. Só lastimar-me podes, / Salvar-me nunca. O Cárcere me aguarda, / E a fogueira talvez, cumpri-la é tempo”

²⁶ Original: “desolada filha”.

²⁷ Original: “pai e esposo”.

obsession of Portuguese inquisitors, and it remained so until the mid-18th century”²⁸. According to Lina Gorenstein (2005, p. 72), several people lost their freedom or their own lives for the simple fact of being a Jew. In the first four decades of the 18th century, for instance, “around 325 New-Christians from Rio de Janeiro were arrested (160 women and 58 men...)”²⁹.

In the poem, Angela’s old father was certainly informed against by their neighbors due to his Crypto-Judaism: a common practice among communities that received Jews. Judges used to be informed by both acquaintances and anonymous individuals. According to Elias Lipiner (1977, p. 59), due to the secret form of the process adopted by the Inquisition, whereby no disclosure was provided to “the accused the name of their informers, fake testimony and accusation by hate or revenge became common practices”³⁰. As pointed out by Grigulevitch (1990, p. 314), the Holy Office persecuted a great part of the bourgeoisie, which encompassed most of the New-Christians, including merchants, lawyers, apothecaries, and soldiers. The victims had their properties seized, which accounted for the Inquisition’s fame as “one of the most profitable enterprises in the Portuguese Crown”³¹.

Perhaps one of the first alleged heresy of Angela’s father was his secretly taking refuge in his reading cabinet, far from the others’ curiosity, to read the Torah, a book prohibited for contradicting the Christian dogmas and included in the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*. Secondly, the old Jew claimed that his most desired homeland was Jerusalem: a land that, before being ruined, was “Beautiful and strong”³², with pretty “attires of gold and silver”³³, a land which only “Moses”, and “not Christ”, could redeem. Such a grieved man, obliged to baptize in Catholicism and to disguise his faith in David’s God before the public was, in Assis’s (1994, p. 114) words, “an ill-fated soul, not totally Christ’s / Not totally Moses’s”³⁴.

Anita Novinsky (1990, p. 8), in one her most important analysis about “The New-Christian”, which has based part of our reflections in this article, observes that the poem “is

²⁸ Original: “a obsessão maior dos inquisidores portugueses, disso não resta dúvida, e assim seria até a metade do século XVIII”

²⁹ Original: ““foram presos cerca de trezentos e vinte e cinco cristãos-novos naturais do Rio de Janeiro (cento e sessenta mulheres e cento e cinquenta e oito homens...)”

³⁰ Original: “aos acusados o nome de seus denunciantes, o testemunho falso e a denúncia por ódio ou vingança tornou-se comum”

³¹ Original: “uma das empresas mais lucrativas da coroa portuguesa”.

³² Original: “Bela e forte”.

³³ Original: “de ouro e prata ornada”.

³⁴ Original: “Alma infeliz nem toda era de Cristo / Nem toda de Moisés”.

constructed dialectically: a constant game between the old and the new, Palestine and America, the generation that goes and the one that comes, the beautiful and the terrible, dream and reality"³⁵. Also, such a dialectic game, or this intense source of dubieties (we should add), later flows into a torrential river of "historical paradoxes and adjustments"³⁶, which, according to Roberto Schwarz (2000, p. 116), characterizes Assis's literary work in *Posthumous Memoirs*. This ambiguous nature, typical in Assis's esthetics, also shapes the identity of the first characters in "The New-Christian", as the poem shows an astonishing reverse in its final stanzas.

Surprisingly, Angela, unlike in the happy ending of romantic narratives, abdicates her love for Nuno, who desperately feels like he had "found the barbarian and frightful death"³⁷ (ASSIS, 1994, p. 124) in the battle field. Determined, Angela surrenders to the Holy Office and decides to keep walking, while hugging her old father, towards the ship that would take them to prison in Portugal. The New-Christian holds the reins of her own fate and chooses her father. Even in the middle of this unexpected turn, Angela still finds strength to cry goodbye to her loving fiancé:

The worrying chest
Like the back of the vessel that tumefies
Is pitched by the wing of storm. "Goodbye," she gasps
And places her head in her father's chest³⁸ (ASSIS, 1994, p. 124)

In the final verses, the father-daughter love wins. Yet, even though Angela continues serene and tender, her father feels that his poor daughter, who lived a brief, lonely youth, conceals in her breast the "internal griefs" to please him, especially when they both embark on the ship that would take them to the beach:

From the ancient Europe, with the face laden
Went the father, not her. Serene and tender,
She enters undeterred the path of bitterness,
With difficulty suffering internal griefs
of her bitter life, the brief flower that she was

³⁵ Original: "is constructed in a dialectic way: always a game between the old and the new, Palestine and America, the generation that comes, the beautiful and the terrible, the dream and reality"

³⁶ Original: "paradoxos e ajustamentos históricos".

³⁷ Original: "encontrado a bárbara e medonha morte".

³⁸ Original: "Arfa-lhe o peito aflito,
Como o dorso da vaga que intumesce
A asa da tempestade. 'Adeus' suspira
E a frente abriga no paterno seio."

Which her mind even briefer appears to her³⁹ (ASSIS, 1994, p. 125)

Anita Novinsky (1990, p. 17) observes another ambiguous, contradictory fact that characterizes the esthetic of "The New-Christian." Before the characters definitively march into the "path of bitterness" and the "perpetual abyss"⁴⁰ that await them, "Machado de Assis inverts their positions". Angela, who up then only reminded of Jesus in the most difficult moments, evokes the Israelian people before surrendering to the executioners. She cries, "The chosen people, smooth, beautiful flower / that fear does not defoliate, not even now that it is dry / to the evil wind of the men's cholera"⁴¹ (ASSIS, 1994, p. 123).

The old father, surprised by his daughter's firm decision to go to prison with him, ceases in his lips David's Psalms, suddenly evoking the "Nazarene" or "the son of mystery"⁴²: that one who would be "the only law of life"⁴³ (ASSIS, 1994, p. 125). This reminds us of Ricardo Forster (2006, p. 10), for whom the New-Christians hold in themselves all opposites and contradictions: "the Marranos both are something which they do not represent and something which they are not"⁴⁴; the Crypto-Jews live in an unsolvable conflict that shape their lives, outlining an uncertain, "itinerant, fugitive, shattered identity but immensely conscious of their shortcomings and wishes that do not stop afflicting them"⁴⁵ (FORSTER, 2006, p. 11). As a matter of fact, shortcomings and insoluble wishes are the earmark of the New-Christian Angela: a kind of martyr or victim of the circumstance that chose the "sacrifice", in Novinsky's (1990, p. 18) words, as she abandoned her wedding to her loving fiancé to be with her old father at the death dungeon. As such, we concur with Novinsky (1990, p. 21) when she says that the poem, besides

³⁹ Original: "Da anciã Europa, carregado o rosto / ia o pai, ela não. Serena e meiga, / Entra afouta o caminho da amargura, / A custo sofrendo internas mágoas / Da amarga vida, breve flor como ela, / Que inda mais breve a mente lhe afigura".

⁴⁰ Original: "perpétuo abismo".

⁴¹ Original: "O eleito povo, flor suave e bela / que o medo não desfolha, nem já seca / ao vento mau da cólera dos homens".

⁴² Original: "o filho do mistério".

⁴³ Original: "a única lei da vida".

⁴⁴ Original: "O marrano é aquilo que não representa e, ao mesmo tempo, representa aquilo que não é".

⁴⁵ Original: "os cripto-judeus vivem um conflito insolúvel que molda sua vida, esboçando uma identidade incerta "itinerante, fugidia, esfacelada, mas intensamente consciente de suas carências e de seus desejos que não deixam de espicaçá-los"

its marks of the contractions of the human soul, is also “pessimist, hopeless. The dreams of the young lady once open to life and love defoliate before reality.”⁴⁶

We could say that Machado de Assis sowed in the verses of “The New-Christian” seeds that portray the intense conflicts between representatives of the Portuguese Holy Office and the Brazilian Crypto-Jews, who had fled to the tropics seeking the possible promised land that would give them “the flower of wheat and honey”⁴⁷. Yet, paradoxically, just like Angela’s old father, they found suffering and intolerance in the middle of the “pompous, merciful, large”⁴⁸ nature (ASSIS, 1994, p. 113).

Such negativity or skepticism, as pointed out by Novinsky, as well as those dreams that “defoliate before reality” are later intensely and maturely engraved in other characters. The New-Christian represents the draft or sketch of women that later inhabits Assis’s short stories and novels – women who, according to Mario de Andrade (2002, p. 111), are more determined to give “a more complex purpose to life”⁴⁹. Other strong characters just like Angela but also marked by a tragic and unfortunate fate, include Rita and Eugenia. Rita, an adulterous character in the short story “A Cartomante”, ends her own adventure as a passionate woman when she is murdered by her jealous husband. Eugenia, a needy young, limping lady in *The Posthumous Memoirs*, one who was anxious to prove a kiss, is abandoned by her fickle boyfriend, Brás Cubas, ending her days lonely, “cripling of both her leg and love”⁵⁰, “sad like the poor’s burial”⁵¹, in Assis’s acid view (ASSIS, 1999, p. 99).

While Angela experienced the Portuguese Inquisition violently, abandoning her fiancé and going with her father to a possible death by burning in a public square, Eugenia and Rita felt on their own skin, not the flames of religious fanaticism but rather the hypocrisy and the conventionalism of a patriarchal and 19th-century bourgeois society. Both are also victims, not of the Inquisition but rather of those “other inquisitions”, in Jorge Luis Borges’s disturbing phrase.

⁴⁶ Original: “pessimista, sem esperanças. Os sonhos da jovem aberta para a vida e o amor se desfolham ante a realidade”.

⁴⁷ Original: “a flor de trigo e mel”.

⁴⁸ Original: “pomposa, compassiva e grande”.

⁴⁹ Original: “uma finalidade mais complexa à vida”.

⁵⁰ Original: “manquejando da perna e do amor”.

⁵¹ Original: “triste como os enterros pobres”.

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