

# Othello's Pathologies: Reading Adolfo Caminha with Lombroso

LESS THAN A DECADE after the abolition of slavery in Brazil in 1888, former naval officer Adolfo Ferreira Caminha published what became known as the first Brazilian novel to feature a “purely” black protagonist.<sup>1</sup> Although Caminha’s *Bom Crioulo* (1895) emulates much of the style and scientific mentality of nineteenth-century naturalism, à la Émile Zola, it is not surprising that in the context of post-abolition Rio de Janeiro (not to mention its appearance the year of Oscar Wilde’s trial) the novel’s depiction of an explicitly sexual relationship between a runaway slave and a white teenage boy caused a sensation.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, some critics reacted with prudish indignation and facetious speculations regarding the author’s own personal experiences or inclinations. In one of the earliest reviews, Valentim Magalhães called it “imundo” (filthy) and “ascoroso” (disgusting) because, according to him, it dealt with “um ramo de pornografia até hoje inédito por inabordável, por antinatural, por ignóbil” (*Notícia*, 19 Nov. 1895, qtd. in Howes 43; a henceforth untouched branch of pornography that should remain unapproachable for being unnatural and despicable).<sup>3</sup> The same critic labeled it a rotten book, a “romance-vômito” (vomit-novel), a “romance-poia” (waste-novel), and a pus-novel, and reproached the author for thinking that a story about the “bestial vices of a black and savage [‘boçal’] sailor could have any literary interest.”

Caminha defended himself in a well-known newspaper piece that explained his intentions in strictly scientific terms.<sup>4</sup> For him, *Bom Crioulo* was

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<sup>1</sup> That is, not mixed-race as in Aluísio de Azevedo’s 1881 *O Mulato* (*The Mulatto*). For studies of black characters in Brazilian literature, see, among others, Sanders, Sussekind, Haberley, Brookshaw, Marotti, and Proença Filho.

<sup>2</sup> Although homosexuality was widely discussed in the scientific circles of the era—it was almost an obsession—explicitly homosexual characters are rare in Zola’s works and in nineteenth-century novels in general. And while heredity often plays an important role in the fate of characters such as Zola’s *Nana*, the category of race—as it was then being fabricated with the help of (pseudo-) scientific theories—was never at the center of French naturalism.

<sup>3</sup> Where not indicated otherwise, translations are my own.

<sup>4</sup> The entire article is reproduced in Bezerra 445–48. Despite the warning of Howes and Mendes, I believe that Caminha’s comments can indeed illuminate the novel.

Nada mais que um caso de inversão sexual estudado por Krafft-Ebbin, em Moll, em Tardieu, e nos livros de medicina legal. Um marinheiro rudo, de origem escrava, sem educação, nem princípio algum de sociabilidade, num momento fatal obedece às tendências homossexuais de seu organismo e pratica uma ação torpe: é um degenerado nato, um irresponsável pelas baixezas que comete até assassinar o amigo, a vítima de seus instintos. Em torno dele se espraia o romance, logicamente encadeado, de acordo com as observações da ciência e com a análise provável do autor, que, no caráter de oficial da marinha, viu os episódios acidentais que descreve a bordo . . . . A julgar como certos imbecis,—que os personagens de um romance devem refletir o caráter do autor do romance, Flaubert, Zola e Eça de Queiroz praticariam incestos e adultérios monstruosos . . . . Qual é mais pernicioso: o BOM-CRIOULO, em que se estuda e condena o homossexualismo, ou essas páginas que aí andam pregando, em tom filosófico, a dissolução da família, o concubinato, o amor livre e toda a espécie de imoralidade social? (“Um Livro Condenado,” reproduced in Bezerra 445–48; emphasis added and, as elsewhere, spelling modernized)

Nothing more than a case of sexual inversion studied in Krafft-Ebing, Moll, Tardieu, and in books of legal medicine. A rude sailor, of slave origin, without education or principles, in a fatal moment obeys the homosexual tendencies of his organism and commits a despicable action: he is a *born degenerate*, not responsible for the baseness that his organism commits until he murders a friend, the victim of his instincts. It is around him that the novel unfolds, logically connected, according to the observations of science and the probable analysis of the author who, as a navy officer, saw on board the episodes he describes. . . . If we are to believe certain imbeciles—according to whom the characters of novels should reflect the authors’ character—Flaubert, Zola, and Eça de Queiroz would have practiced incest and monstrous acts . . . . What is more pernicious: *Bom Crioulo*, in which homosexuality is studied and condemned, or those pages that are going around and preaching in a philosophical tone the dissolution of the family, concubinage, free love and all sorts of social immorality?

Caminha tries to deflate further the potentially transgressive nature of his book—which, he argues, merely “studies and condemns” homosexuality—by mentioning two other Lusophone naturalist novels that had previously dealt with the subject of homosexuality: *Um Homem Gasto* (*An Exhausted Man*, 1885), by the Brazilian Ferreira Leal, and *O Barão de Lavos* (*The Baron of Lavos*, 1891), by the Portuguese Abel Botelho. He also suggests that the boundaries between the scientific and pornographic gaze cannot always be clearly defined by inviting his detractors into his personal library to share his own voyeuristic—that is, scientific—pleasures: “Se a crítica, ingênua e pudibunda, lançasse o olhar sobre o volume de Tardieu que eu tenho na minha estante com umas gravuras horríveis e competentemente numeradas, representando *les desordres que produit la pédèrastie passive ou la sodomie* . . . não sei que gestos de náusea faria, cobrindo o rosto com a mão em leque” (448; If critics naively and prudishly laid their eyes on Tardieu’s volume that I have on my bookshelf, with its horrible drawings, very competently numbered, representing *the disorders caused by passive pederasty or sodomy* . . . I don’t know what gestures of disgust they would make, covering their faces as with a fan).

In spite of this voyeuristic and homosocial invitation, however, Caminha reiterates that his novel is not pornographic because it does not conduct a “legal and medical exam of *Aleixo*” (448; emphasis added), the white victim of the black man’s sexual perversions. That is, the black homosexual constitutes a natural (and morally acceptable) object of scientific investigation, because the reader is not asked to focus on the homosexual acts of otherwise non-deviant subjects. To the contrary, by calling the attention of the presumably white and male reader to the fate of the deviant black protagonist, the novel discourages any identification between whiteness and “congenital” homosexuality.

Yet, even considering the normative and pathologizing aspects of nineteenth-century transnational naturalism, the fictional representation of an openly sexual

relationship between a thirty-year-old black man and a fifteen-year-old white youth was, and for some readers remains, intriguing if not “unapproachable.” The audacity of the subject matter made Caminha’s book an ambivalent object of repudiation, curiosity, and, in recent years, celebration. After having faded from circulation for a few decades, and following a period in which it was censored, *Bom Crioulo* has been regularly published since the late 1950s and has become part of the canon of Brazilian literature, even if not quite at its center—widely read, studied, adopted, and reprinted in a variety of popular and educational editions for high school students in Brazil. But whereas Brazilian critics and educators have traditionally focused on the work’s strictly scientific intentions, the 1982 publication of an English translation by the Gay Sunshine Press has drawn the attention of gay-identified audiences and literary critics, some of whom have reclaimed it as a foundational text in Brazilian, or even world, “gay literature.”<sup>5</sup>

Despite the novel’s importance and novelty, however, these gay appropriations risk reproducing, from the opposite direction, early voyeuristic or sensationalist readings of the novel by downplaying the declared scientific intentions of the book, dissociating the theme of homosexuality from race, and therefore separating scientific racism from homophobia. *Bom Crioulo* indeed contains provocative, unusual, and seemingly transgressive passages (the novel causes some of my North American students to blush): the overt same-sex and interracial relationship, the seemingly positive portrayal of the good-natured and virtuous black homosexual, and the alternative, gender-shifting triangulation of the family unit that is briefly sketched in the novel’s second half may all seem to be welcome exceptions within the canon of nineteenth-century novels. However, I believe it is more prudent to heed the French critic who recently labeled *Bom Crioulo* the first “gayexploitation” novel (Loret), for the novel is better understood when read at the intersection of late nineteenth-century naturalism, scientific discourse, European decadence, and popular literature. Indeed, *Bom Crioulo* shares many of the characteristics as well as the intended audiences of *fin-de-siècle* “romances para homens” (novels for men) or “romance de sensação” (sensational novels), which included such titles as Figueiredo Pimentel’s *Aborto* (*The Abortion*, 1893) and *O Terror dos Maridos* (*The Husbands’ Terror*, 1897) (see El Far).

Because genres and audiences were not clearly delineated in the incipient literary market of late nineteenth-century Brazil, the sensationalist intentions of popular literature and the scientific ambitions of French naturalism often competed for a limited readership. Without ignoring Caminha’s possible sensationalist motivations (or at least the novel’s reception as sensational), I nevertheless insist on the normative and disciplinary aspects of Caminha’s novel and propose that we take the author at his word and read *Bom Crioulo* not simply in light of Darwinian theories of evolution and heredity, but, more specifically, as a case study of those theories of degeneration that, no matter how fragmented or partial their Brazilian reception might have been, informed and fascinated the author and his contemporaries. In particular, I want to read the novel as a case

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Fry and Foster. The book has now been translated into Spanish (*El Buen Negro*, 2008; *Buen Criollo*, 2005; *Buen Criollo*, 2008), German (*Tropiche Nacht*, 1994), French (*Rue de la Misericorde*, 1996), and Italian (*Il Negro*, 2005). Significantly, it has not been reclaimed as a black or Afro-Brazilian novel. See Mazzei’s discussion of the strategies used in the English translation to increase the novel’s appeal to gay audiences.

study reflecting Cesare Lombroso's criminal anthropology, which was widely read and commented upon in Brazil. Caminha not only read Lombroso, but also repeatedly praised his theories.<sup>6</sup> To put it another way: I suggest that we believe the author's declared intentions and follow his explicit instructions at least momentarily and turn our attention from the *pornographic* to the *anthropological*. Rather than imposing our own contemporary (homosocial or colonial) desires on the naturalist text, we should, following both Caminha's and Lombroso's instructions, turn our gaze from the victim or the crime scene to the novel's construction of the criminal. This concern with the "other" is explicit in the warning, which is also an interpellation, in the final paragraphs of the book (cf. Mendes 213):

A rua enchia-se de gente pelas janelas, pelas portas, pelas calçadas. Era uma uma curiosidade tumultuosa e flagrante a saltar dos olhos, um desejo irresistível de *ver*, uma irresistível atração, uma ânsia! Ninguém se importava com 'o outro,' com o negro, que lá ia, rua abaixo, triste e desolado, entre baionetas, à luz quase quente da manhã: todos, porém, todos queiram "*ver* o cadaver," analisar o ferimento, meter o nariz na chaga (*Bom Crioulo* 80)

The street was filling up with people at windows, in doorways, on the sidewalks. It was a disorderly, patently obvious curiosity, an irresistible desire to *see*, an irresistible attraction, a need!

Nobody paid any attention to the other combatant, to the black man, who was being marched down the street now, sad and grief-stricken, between two rows of pointed bayonets, in the hot light of morning: everyone wanted to *see* the body, to analyze the scar, to stick his nose in the wound (Lacey 141)

### Caminha and Lombroso

Like the naturalist detective novel in Argentina, which depicts the bodies of the mixed-race subject and the immigrant as threats to the project and destiny of the national self (Nouzeilles 131–35), Caminha's *Bom Crioulo* attempts to isolate, and thus correct, social deviation (or *degeneration*, as it was called at the time) by closely associating the black man with non-reproductive sexuality. Indeed, from the hereditary theories of Augustin Morel's *Traité des dégénérescences physiques, intellectuelles et morales de l'espèce humaine et des causes qui produisent ces variétés maladives* (1857; see Serpa and Foucault) to Max Nordau's extremely popular *Degeneration* (1892) to various studies that appeared following the publication of *Bom Crioulo* three years later, a number of books appeared with titles that included the term "degeneration" or discussed physical, moral, or cultural degeneracy and decay in Europe as well as Brazil.<sup>7</sup> For Morel, "degenerescence" was the morbid deviation of an original type—a deviation in which moral and physical conditions were genetically transmitted and became exacerbated in later generations (possibly leading

<sup>6</sup> For the historical and intellectual background in which the novel was written, as well as a survey of the book's critical reception, see Howes. For cases of homosexuality among navy officers, see Beattie, "Conflicting Penile Codes." See also Beattie's comprehensive biographical study "Adolfo Ferreira Caminha."

<sup>7</sup> For a study of Morel's work, see Serpa, "O Degenerado." For an overview of degeneration theories, see Herman 108–44. Among the titles published in nineteenth-century Brazil are: Lucio-Joaquim de Oliveira, *Da Degeneração Psychica* (1891); J. da Silva Botelho, *Herança* (1878); E. da Rocha Barros, *Estygmias da degeneração psychica* (1893); and Francisco Alcedo da Silva Marrocos, *Do Crime Como Causa De Degenerescência* (1896). Raffaele Garofalo's work was published in Brazil as *Criminologia: Estudo Sobre o Delicto e a Repressão Penal*, translated by Julio Xavier de Mattos (1893).

to sterility or extinction of a lineage). As Dain Borges has suggested, in Brazil (and particularly during the nineteenth century), “degeneration” became a “catch-all” term that included, but also transcended or manipulated, the issue of race and color (236):

The mainstream concerns of European thought were different. Danger to the social organism came not only from brown people or Jews. It came from alcoholics, sexual deviants (especially homosexuals), syphilitics, prostitutes, and criminals. “Excesses” of all sorts, including excesses of civilization—too much urbanity, too much soft comfort—could weaken a nation and breed neurasthenics. Degeneration theory did not add to the pre-existing roster of deviants, so much as it lumped and interconnected them in a new way. It fed a new concern with the reproduction of society and a new focus upon women and men in procreation, maternity, and child rearing. (238)

By the end of the century the focus had shifted from a general etiology of degeneration to the study of degenerate subjects, and it was probably Lombroso and his fellow criminologists who were most widely quoted, if not always read, in Brazilian (liberal) intellectual circles.<sup>8</sup> A year before the publication of his novel, Caminha himself reviewed *Nova Escola Penal* (*The New Penal School*), a survey of criminal anthropology’s main ideas and exponents, written by the journalist, fiction writer, and Lombroso enthusiast Viveiro de Castro, who a year later would also publish *Atentados Contra o Pudor* (*Offenses Against Mores*), the first Brazilian medical-legal text to include a study of homosexuality. Although Caminha points out some of the work’s shortcomings—he complains, for example, that the author did not apply Lombroso’s ideas to the study of Brazilian slang (208)—he praises the work as a whole: for him, de Castro’s is more than a *good* book; it is a *necessary* book, if only for disseminating the revolutionary ideas of the “chefe supremo da escola penal” (206; supreme chief of the penal school) among Brazilians. Caminha ends his review with an endorsement of “a geração forte de hoje, que estuda o criminoso da mesma forma que o médico estuda um cadáver, à luz da verdadeira ciência” (202; the strong generation of today, which studies the criminal in the same way a doctor studies a body, in the light of true science).<sup>9</sup>

Lombroso’s school of criminology was primarily concerned with challenging some of the Enlightenment foundations of criminal justice promulgated in Cesare Beccaria’s *On Crimes and Punishment* (1764), which appealed to the rationality of laws and, among other things, proposed that punishment should be proportional to the crime. For Beccaria, the purpose of punishment was not retaliation, but the prevention of future crimes, both by the individual and broader society. Lombroso was equally opposed to the notion of justice as retaliation, but he was less interested in judging criminal *acts* according to established categories than he was in identifying and classifying their actors in order to propose specific forms of rehabilitating (rather than punishing) those criminals who could be treated.

It is difficult to summarize coherently Lombroso’s main ideas, not only because he constantly revised them or because they were not always his own, but also

<sup>8</sup> One of the first works to mention Lombroso in Brazil is *Ensaio de Direito Penal ou Repetições Escritas sobre o Código Criminal do Império do Brasil* (1884) by João Vieira de Araújo. That same year, Tobias Barreto also mentions *Uomo Delinquente* in his *Menores e Loucos*. For a survey of the reception of criminology in Brazil, see Alvarez.

<sup>9</sup> As late as 1946, Lombroso’s ideas continued to inform such works as Lemos Britto’s *Os Crimes e os Criminosos na Literatura Brasileira*, which does not mention Adolfo Caminha and asserts that homosexuality has not been much explored in Brazilian literature (279).

because his arguments tend to rely less on causalities than loose associations.<sup>10</sup> He did not consider (hot) weather, race, heredity, or degeneration theories per se as sufficient explanations of criminality (HC1 658), and, although he considered the role of degeneration and “morbid heredity” in the genesis of crime, he hesitated to define all contemporary pathologies (from madness to genius, and from muteness to cancer) as symptoms of degeneration. For him, the “degenerative state” or “arrested development” of a single organ or capacity did not necessarily reveal the degeneration of the entire body (HC1 659). Instead, Lombroso became increasingly concerned with the intersections between readable, physical (as well as psychological and moral) traits or *stigmata*. He adopted Darwin’s evolutionary monogenism, which posed that all men shared the same ancestry and that the most imperfect race (for Lombroso, blacks) had gradually evolved into the most perfect one (white), which alone had attained the most harmonious physical, moral, and cultural features. These signs of superiority, Lombroso believed, were further bolstered by the fact that only white males had, among other features of civilization, developed alphabetical writing, reached the authentic meaning of nationality, and abolished slavery (*L’Uomo Bianco* 222–23). At the same time, because certain “atavistic anomalies” can occasionally survive and be identified even in the most “advanced” individuals (and in theory signs of “retrograde heredity” or atavism might be absent in the “inferior races”), Lombroso invited the reader to analyze the “arrested development” of a given criminal subject as a mosaic that might include conditions—intelligence and harmonious forms, for example—that seemed to indicate a healthy and fully developed individual (HC1 659).

Rather than reasserting the common basis of all humanity, Lombroso was generally interested (though not necessarily convincing) in combining perceived characteristics into categories for the classification of physical and moral differences. As Mary Gibbons has suggested, he and some of his peers were anxious about the absence of a unifying Italian “type,” since the ethnically diverse South (where he had lived and worked) was increasingly identified as backwards and hospitable to violence and organized crime (Gibbons 121). But Lombroso’s stance on miscegenation was rather ambiguous: although he believed that racial mixing could in some cases lead to degeneration, he also called attention to Brazilians and Jews (like himself) as exceptions (*L’uomo bianco* 15; see Gibson 98–101). As was common at the time, he described mixing with “inferior” races as detrimental (as he believed the experience of Europeans in Africa had demonstrated); mixing with “superior” races, on the other hand, could occasionally be beneficial. This had been the case in Cuba, where racial mixing increased the “revolutionary index” of otherwise tradition-bound blacks. Lombroso, furthermore, did not always differentiate between social mingling and genetic mixing. In some of his writings the child produced by biological miscegenation was paralleled by, if not identified with, the miscegenated body of the newly born nation: in the Caribbean, for example, the mixture of whites with blacks who

<sup>10</sup> In the following citations I use the second Italian edition (1878) and the 1887 French edition, supposedly translated from the fourth Italian edition (1889?) of volume 1 and the 1895 translation of the fifth edition of volume 2 (?), indicated as UD, HC1, and HC2 respectively. Gibson’s English translation, for which I used the Kindle edition (here indicated as CM), traces the omissions and additions from one edition to another. There is some confusion regarding the dates of all of these texts, since the translations appear to have been published before the Italian originals.

had recently become citizens caused the disorganization and demoralization of both whites and mulattoes (*Homme de Génie* 196). This concern with racial diversity may explain the appeal that Lombroso's theories held in post-abolition Brazil for intellectuals such as Adolfo Caminha, many of whom resembled the Italian criminologist in that they were both highly invested in discrediting pessimistic predictions regarding hybridity (such as Arthur de Gobineau's) and somewhat less concerned with the fate of mixed-race subjects than with the ethnic unification of the nation (see Gibson 121).

Lombroso's "method" was indeed detective-like; he read traces of the primitive in the physiognomy of modern criminals. For example, he was convinced that thieves tended to have flattened noses, whereas the aquiline nose reminiscent of birds of prey was typical of murderers. Although tainted by racial prejudice, his theory of criminality was not based solely on categories of race and ethnicity, but also on the belief that, due to particular and often mysterious circumstances, primitive physical or moral traits may have survived and could at any time come to the surface in the modern man (or woman). While he probably would have argued that the bodies of all blacks contained the marks of the atavistic type, neither race nor the environment was sufficient to explain the causes of crime. His primary concern was to identify those signs of atavism that in one way or another were transmitted biologically and, moreover, translated into a tendency to commit crime. To put it another way, criminality for Lombroso (as for Caminha) was a sort of anachronism or form of reverse heredity. It could be associated with traces or symptoms of primitivism that remained readable in both modern man and modern civilization generally. Atavistic traits could accumulate and combine into what he called a "maximum of monstrosity" (HC 669)—"the beast within" made famous by Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), whose main character was a "criminal and a criminal type" in the way that Lombroso and Nordau would have classified him (Herman 124; see, also, Mendes 121–71).

In short, Lombroso wanted his readers to believe that criminals were sudden throwbacks on the evolutionary scale or, as he famously stated it, "are atavistic reproductions of not only savage men but also the most ferocious carnivores and rodents" (CM Kindle loc. 3400). At the same time, in the case of the criminal, "disease is added to monstrosity" (HC1 657). As a result, the criminologist should start by establishing specific criteria for identifying those traits in ("whitish") Europeans that may be reminiscent of primitive societies (mainly Africans and American Indians) or other underdeveloped forms of life (children, animals, and even plants). In illustrating his method, Lombroso argued that, like primitive men, criminals tended to have less hair on their bodies, lack physical sensitivity and feelings of remorse, be unpredictable in a way that often *resembles* courage, demonstrate extreme vanity, love gambling and alcohol, and overuse metaphors, onomatopoeia, personification, and so on in speech (HC 661–62).

Lombroso's argument often obscures and intermingles causes and symptoms of crime: are criminals naturally inclined to alcoholism, or is alcohol a catalyst for the manifestation of atavistic impulses? If biology defines the criminal, how can we explain the importance he places on cultural characteristics and behaviors (for example, tattoos and the use of slang) in identifying the criminal? At once

acquired and inherited, cultural and biological, certain characteristics could be seen as signs that identified the criminal, particularly the so-called born criminal. In short, Lombroso's project purported to establish a scientific justification for stereotyping.

### **Amaro, The Good Criminal**

This rhetoric of degeneration—and particularly the unrelenting concern with crime and the (im)possibility of re-generation—is at the center of Caminha's narrative. In the very first paragraph of *Bom Crioulo*, the narrator recoils (“que pena!”) at the image of a decaying ship, filled with illiterate men of different races and shades, sailing across the seas of the “patria” (“fatherland”). The chapter goes on to describe a remarkable parade of racial types and stereotypes, portraits and bodily displays that are framed according to Lombroso-like physiognomic categories and pathologies such as the “moreno” (10; “dark-skinned,” Lacey 26) and the “exotic figure” of a “black sailor (‘negro’) with very white eyes, exaggeratedly thick lips that opened in a vague, imbecilic smile, and a face whose features betokened both stupidity and subservience” (10; 27). The narrator also gradually introduces three men, convicted of very different crimes, who are about to be disciplined in a sensational and sado-masochistic spectacle of public flogging that clearly alludes to the regime of slavery. The first is the cabin boy Herculano, a “yellowish, clay-faced boy” (“amarelo cor de terra”) convicted of “um verdadeiro crime não previsto nos códigos, um crime de lesa-natureza, derramando inutilmente, no convés seco e estéril, a seiva geradora do homem” (14; “a real crime, one not listed in the rule-books, a crime against nature, pouring out uselessly, on the dry and sterile deck, the generative juice of man,” 32). The second is a mulatto named Sant’anna, who is “moreno cor de jenipapo” (“dark, walnut skinned”), afflicted by a congenital stammer, and has a “nariz acaçapado, cara magra” (“flattened nose and a gaunt face”). He is guilty of having provoked a fight by spying on a masturbating shipmate.

In contrast to the weakness and apparent decay of this multi-racial community of sailors, the third convict, the protagonist Amaro, is characterized above all by his “nervous” strength:

Seguia-se o terceiro preso, um latagão de negro, muito alto e corpulento, figura colossal de cafre, desafiando, com um formidável sistema de músculos, a morbidez patológica de toda uma geração decadente e enervada, e cuja presença ali, naquela ocasião, despertava grande interesse e viva curiosidade: era o Amaro, gajeiro da proa—o BOM-CRIOULO na gíria de bordo . . .

Bom-Crioulo não era somente um homem robusto, uma dessas organizações privilegiadas que trazem no corpo a sobranceira resistência do bronze e que esmagam com o peso dos músculos . . . A força nervosa era nele uma qualidade intrínseca sobrepujando todas as outras qualidades fisiológicas, emprestando-lhes movimentos extraordinários, invencíveis mesmo, de um acrobatismo imprevisível e raro. (15)

The third prisoner followed, a tall, robust giant of a black man, a colossal, savage figure, defying, with his formidable set of muscles, the diseased softness and weakness of a whole decadent, enervated generation. His presence there, on this occasion, stirred great interest and lively curiosity: he was Amaro, the prow topwatch, known as Bom-Crioulo in shipboard slang . . .

For Bom-Crioulo was not just a strong man, not just one of these lucky organisms that possess the resistant qualities of bronze and that pulverize all opposition with the weight of their muscles . . . Nervous strength was his intrinsic characteristic and asset, surpassing all his other bodily attributes, and it gave him an extraordinary, really invincible mobility, a rare, unpredictable acrobatic quality. (Lacey 33–34)



The narrator seems to suggest that within this community of coevals and/or contemporaries there are dissimilarities that make a “generation” (and, we may infer, the young nation) physically and temporally heterogeneous. Those exceptional qualities, which the narrator calls “a precious gift of nature,” turn out to be the black man’s greatest weakness. In line with Lombroso’s description of the atavistic or regressive tendencies of the “born criminal,” Amaro is an extremely jealous man whose susceptibility to alcohol leads him to “crazy excesses” and turns him into a dangerous criminal, a “beast let out of a cage” (Lacey 34). He thus cannot help getting into violent fights that lead to punishment by authorities on and off the ship, yet, like Lombroso’s “delinquente nato,” Amaro is insensitive to pain. In addition to lacking the capacity for moral and physical constraint, he is unpredictable and arrogant. He speaks the “linguagem torpe dos galés” (33; “rough language of the galley-slave” 66), and even his epithet, *Bom Crioulo*, is said to be “slang.” He is jealous, vain, and inclined to the over-appreciation of aesthetic objects and physical qualities—as when he gives his lover Aleixo a cheap mirror, so that “[he] can see how good looking [he is]” (51). He tends toward “excesses,” sexual and otherwise, and unproductive habits (such as nocturnal emissions). He accumulates fetishes and collects useless artifacts: his dark and dusty room in the attic of a Portuguese woman’s boarding house is full of “little rococo objects, figurines, decorations, things of no value,” a “Jewish bazaar . . . filled up with bric-à-brac (‘bugigangas’), and accumulated empty boxes, vulgar sea-shells and other ornamental accessories” (73).<sup>11</sup> If anachronism was indeed associated with the *fin-de-siècle* homosexual (Mendes 203), a composite of atavisms defines Amaro as a “born criminal”; race is more decisive than sexuality, but both are unchangeable. Thus, in the context of a Brazil recently proclaimed Republic, the portrait of the emperor that Amaro keeps and worships in his room does not denote a vanishing world associated with the anti-modern attachments of homosexuals, as in Oscar Wilde and Marcel Proust (Mendes 203), or a mere primitive form of anachronistic fetishism and idolatry, but rather the black man’s atavistic attachment to an archaic and outdated political regime that he believes favors him. It resonates with the perceived attachments and loyalties of former slaves and blacks in general to the “indulgent” monarch, even after the proclamation of the Republic in 1889, one year after Isabel signed off on the final abolition of slavery.<sup>12</sup> The novel thus exposes two of the nation’s most powerful “anachronistic symptoms” (Didi-Houmerman 39): the historical discontinuities ingrained in the memories of monarchy and slavery.

Slavery also returns to haunt the historical present in the long flashback in the second chapter of the novel: “Ainda estava longe, bem longe a vitória do abolicionismo, quando Bom Crioulo, então simplesmente Amaro, veio, ninguém sabe donde” (17; “It was still long, long before the abolition of slavery when Bom-Crioulo, then known simply as Amaro, appeared, coming from God knows where,” Lacey 37). It is not that Caminha views slavery as the sole cause of Amaro’s crimes

<sup>11</sup> As Peter Beattie suggests, the novel teaches that the waste of man’s “generative juices” in same-sex copulation leads to physical and psychological degeneration (*Human Tradition* 102).

<sup>12</sup> See Beattie, “Adolfo Ferreira Caminha” 104; Mendes, *O Retrato* 201. Most critics assume that the monarch here is Pedro II. But one might consider as well the public monument to Pedro I, which, as James Green has shown, was located at the center of the Largo do Rosio, an area frequented by men seeking sex with other men (*Além do Carnaval* 53).

(see Brookshaw 39); he seems to believe instead that it constitutes a past reality that erupts as one of many marks or stigmata in modern society—particularly in a multi-racial city like Rio de Janeiro, but also in some regions of the U.S. Indeed, when describing his visit to North America in *No país dos Ianques* (published in 1894, nine years after his trip to the U.S. and a year before the novel's publication), Caminha calls Annapolis “uma nota dissonante na civilização Americana” (“a dissonant note in American civilization”):

Imagine-se um quilombo africano, uma grande aldeia cortada de ruas desiguais, estreitas e desalinhas, com um aspecto sombrio e detestável de velho burgo colonial, onde se move uma população na maior parte negra e atrasadíssima—e ter-se-á essa antítese da cidade moderna

Imagine an African maroon community, a large village dissected by narrow, uneven, and unaligned streets, with the somber aspect of an old colonial burg, where a population, for the most part black and backward, circulates—and you have the antithesis of the modern city (qtd. in English in Beatrice, “Adolfo Ferreira Caminha” 95)

A similar concern with any such anti-modern “blemish” on the Brazilian map seems to have motivated the writing of Caminha's novel. In his behavior, as well as his savage (“cafre”) physiognomy, Amaro shows signs of primitivism (and therefore a congenital tendency towards crime), but he is never presented as a wholly primitive man. As his nickname indicates, he is not a mulatto or a “bozal” (an African born in Africa) like the “Angolans” who live on the first floor of the boarding house at Rua da Misericórdia. Instead, he is a Brazilian-born “*bom crioulo*” (an obvious allusion to the noble savage), who therefore has a certain position in the line of evolution or civilization. A product of degeneration, he is also a symptom of modernity and uneven modernization. Contrary to most readings of the novel (see Foster 13; Fry 49; Mendes 199), there is no contradiction or sign of redemption in the fact that Amaro is a truly heroic and often sympathetic figure, perhaps the only virtuous and loyal character in the novel. As Lombroso had argued, “la vertu, dans ce monde, est déjà une grande anomalie” (*Anthropologie Criminelle* 8; virtue, in this world, is already a great anomaly) in the same way that saintliness, “the most complete virtue,” is often accompanied by hysteria and moral insanity.

The black homosexual in *Bom Crioulo* stands for such “dissonance” in the streets of the modern Brazilian city, where few passersby pay the attention that types such as homosexuals, drunkards, and epileptics deserve, just as readers fail to pay attention to the murderer at the novel's end. Amaro's murder of Aleixo, which cannot be explained solely by his race, does not prove his criminal nature, but rather only confirms what the book has indicated from the beginning through a number of signs (alcoholism, short temper, insensitivity to pain, agility, extreme jealousy, and other “mysterious” factors) that are the business of the modern criminologist (and novelist) to identify and about which Aleixo, himself, sometimes seems ambivalent: “a cada instante lembrava-se da musculatura rija de Bom Crioulo, de seu gênio rancoroso e vingativo, de sua natureza extraordinária—híbrido conjunto de malvadez e tolerância, de seus arrebatamentos, de sua tendência para o crime” (59; “he constantly remembered Bom Crioulo's hard, rippling muscles, his vengeful, unforgiving nature, his extraordinary temperament—a strange hybrid of viciousness and tolerance—his fits of passion, his criminal tendencies, and all this, all these memories, frightened him,” Lacey 107).

Caminha's narrative is haunted by memories like these, with temporal disjunctions, analeptic images, and synecdoches that parallel Amaro's manifestations of atavism. This is precisely why the author focuses on Amaro: he cannot decide whether or how to include men of African descent and the living memories of slavery in a Rio de Janeiro struggling to civilize and Europeanize itself. *Bom Crioulo* does not simply reflect the biological determinism or social Darwinism of the late nineteenth century. It also aims to showcase virtually all characteristics of the "degenerado nato" (born degenerate).

### Nature against Nature

Unlike Aleixo or the other homosexuals and (lighter-skinned) law-breakers on the ship, Amaro's congenital tendency towards crime cannot be dissociated from either his homosexual inclinations or his race. Although homosexuality for Caminha (as for Lombroso) constitutes a crime in itself (insofar as "crime" is the secularized word for "sin"), it can also be a sign (stigma) that indicates one's criminal nature or the degeneration of an organism (broadly understood as the secular version of the Fall of Man). In Amaro's case, biology works against Natural Law, since nature herself compelled him to commit that unnamable crime ("delito" in Portuguese, just as in Lombroso's Italian) "against nature" (60; 30). The real novelty of Caminha's work is its explicit examination of congenital homosexuality in its intersection with the accepted belief in the immutability of race.

To be clear, Lombroso did not have much to say about the so-called crimes against nature, but his position is implicit in his definitions of crime and the criminal.<sup>13</sup> The first mention of homosexuality in a later edition of his magnum opus occurs when he notes that crowded spaces constitute a particularly favorable condition for all forms of crime, including sodomy. He argues that, even among animals, unsatisfied desires may lead males (not surprisingly, he does not seem to contemplate a female agglomerate) to "pleasures against nature" such as the rape of infants and interspecies sex (analogous to bestiality in men) (HC 16–17). Although Lombroso does not say so explicitly, he was probably thinking of spaces such as the ship, the prison, and the boarding school, which many of his contemporary scientists considered to be conducive to unnatural and anti-social acts like masturbation, rape, and sodomy (see Beattie, "Disputed Sale"). Indeed, Caminha was perhaps one of the first modern writers explicitly to depict the homosocial space of the navy ship as an archetypal setting for "unnatural" behaviors and "mysterious friendships" focusing on genital, same-sex relationships. According to Lombroso's doctrine, however, while the masculine homosocial space may have favored the manifestation of Amaro's homosexuality, it is not its cause.

A further sign of atavism for Lombroso was the Darwinian notion that both inferior life forms and primitive societies lack gender differentiation (HC 661). Hermaphroditism and androgyny characterize the young Aleixo and the Portuguese landlady who introduces him to heteronormative sexuality, but this is certainly not true of Amaro, who insists on feminizing his white lover, but almost never doubts his own masculinity and his own sexual attraction to men:

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<sup>13</sup> Lombroso discusses hermaphroditism and pederasty in a section on the genital organs that was eliminated from later editions (UD 300–03).

Bom-Crioulo sentia uma febre extraordinária de erotismo, um delírio invencível de gozo pederasta. Agora compreendia nitidamente que só no homem, no próprio homem, ele podia encontrar aquilo que de balde procurara nas mulheres. Nunca se apercebera de semelhante anomalia, nunca em sua vida tivera a lembrança de perscrutar suas tendências em matéria de sexualidade . . . Não havia jeito, senão ter paciência, uma vez que a “natureza” impunha-lhe esse castigo . . . Afinal de contas era homem, tinha suas necessidades, como qualquer outro: fizera muito em conservar-se virgem até aos trinta anos, passando vergonhas que ninguém acreditava, sendo muitas vezes obrigado a cometer excessos que os médicos proibem. De qualquer modo estava justificado perante sua consciência, tanto mais quanto havia exemplos ali mesmo a bordo, para não falar em certo oficial de quem se diziam cousas medonhas no tocante à fica particular. Se os brancos faziam, quanto mais os negros! É que nem todos têm força para resistir: a natureza pode mais que a vontade humana (32)

Bom Crioulo felt an extraordinary fever of eroticism, an uncontrollable ecstasy of homosexual pleasure. Now he understood clearly that only with a man, with a man like himself, could he find what in vain he had looked for among women. He had never been aware of this anomaly in himself; never in his life did he recall having had to examine his sexual tendencies . . . Well there was nothing he could do except be patient, seeing that it was “nature” herself who was imposing this punishment on him. After all he was a man, and he had his sexual needs, like any other man. It had been hard enough as it was for him to remain a virgin till the age of thirty, enduring embarrassments that no one would believe, and being obliged often to commit excesses which medical science condemns. Anyhow, his own conscience was clear, all the more so because there were examples right there on board of conduct similar to his—not to mention a certain officer concerning whose personal life terrible rumors were spread. And if the white man did it, the black man was even more likely to! For not everybody has the strength to resist: nature is stronger than the human will (Lacey 64)

Whether such biological fatalism, expressed in free indirect speech, implies internalized racism on the part of the black character or its universalization by the omniscient narrator-author, in this *fin-de-siècle* post-abolition narrative the black man is inevitably more prone to commit crimes (including those against nature) than his white and mulatto counterparts. This is not to say that homosexuality is seen as uncommon among non-black sailors. But in the figure of Bom-Crioulo race and sexuality are associated in such a way that one can neither be changed nor understood without the other. Although he briefly considers whether things would be better if he were to befriend a woman of his own color, Amaro immediately realizes that such a change is beyond his reach (50; Lacey 93). In other words, he must remain as he was *born*: black and homosexual.

The distinction between “born criminals” and “occasional criminals” at the core of Lombroso’s doctrine helps explain both the stigmatization of the new black citizen and the medicalization of the homosexual in late nineteenth-century Brazil. While Lombroso’s early works do not explicitly discriminate between the occasional and born varieties of either criminals or homosexuals, this distinction had already been formulated by several contemporary authors that both he and Caminha cite in their work. In fact, Lombroso’s taxonomy of the criminal, developed in the second volume of *The Criminal Man*, is reminiscent of the nineteenth-century theories of homosexuality to which Caminha alludes. For example, Ambroise Tardieu’s graphic examination of lifestyles and the sexualized body in his *Étude Médico-légale sur les attentats aux moeurs* (*A Legal-Medical Study of Offenses Against Mores*) had already associated crime and homosexuality—“L’assassinat a-t-il précédé ou favorisé par des actes contre nature?” (157; Was the murder preceded or favored by acts against nature?)—and, by facilitating recognition of the “pederast” according to specific signs, hoped to extirpate the “vice.”

The second work on sexuality that Caminha mentions, the 1886 bestseller *Psychopathia Sexualis* (largely a defense of human procreation) by the Austro-

German Richard von Krafft-Ebing, explicitly relates biology and human sexuality to psychology and argues that anomalies of the sexual organs are specific to civilized cultures (48). For Krafft-Ebing, “the determining factor here is the demonstration of perverse feeling for the same sex; not the proof of sexual acts with the same sex” (286). Homosexuality, among other “antipathic sexual instincts” (the total absence of sexual feeling toward the opposite sex), could in some cases be due to a form of “perversion,” a sign of hereditary degeneration. But he also identifies cases of acquired (or latent) homosexuality (285), which are “occasional” or circumstantial moral “perversities” rather than natural predispositions. “Perversion” is a characteristic of degenerate, diseased subjects who should be the object of pity or compassion. “Perversity,” on the other hand, is a vice that can and should be disciplined and rehabilitated. The third and most recent source Caminha references, *Perversions of the Sexual Instinct* (1891), by the German Albert Moll, classifies any sexual deviation from the goal of procreation or propagation, regardless of its object, as a morbid state of the “psychic function.” His (and Caminha’s) teleological approach—procreation is sexuality’s one and only aim—clusters all non-reproductive functions as perversions.<sup>14</sup>

Rather than being undecided as to the congenital or acquired nature of homosexuality (as Mendes suggests), Caminha clearly agreed with and declared his admiration for the theories of Krafft-Ebing and Moll, both of whom distinguished congenital from occasional homosexuality. Aleixo’s “identidade sexual em fluxo” (Mendes 185) and even the androgyny of Carolina (the boarding-house landlady) reflect this distinction (cf. also Green 76). While Lombroso’s first editions were primarily concerned with isolating the “born criminal,” he later added new types of crimes that can be attributed to circumstances and conditions such as “moral madness,” passion (or impetus), and occasion rather than solely to the subject’s innate inclinations. Lombroso’s conclusions about the criminal man thus parallel his contemporaries’ views on homosexuality to the extent that they seem to feed off each other. A born criminal can remain in a latent stage and never become a criminal. A criminal of occasion can also, in some cases, turn into a habitual criminal, whose behavior is no different from that of the born criminal (Lombroso, *AC* 104). The same can be said of the homosexual, whose behavior is merely one crime among many.

### ***Bom Crioulo’s Judgment***

As I have suggested, *Bom Crioulo* unequivocally categorizes and opposes *born criminals* to *occasional criminals* both by explicitly linking these categories to the accepted opposition between born and occasional or circumstantial homosexuality and by loosely associating everything congenital with the predestination and immutability of race. Yet, although they are contemporary with the elaboration of the new Republican penal code, Caminha’s writings give little indication of the disciplinary or regulatory measures the author condones regarding criminality in

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<sup>14</sup> Studies on homosexuality also appeared in late nineteenth-century Brazil. For a discussion of Francisco Ferraz de Macedo’s *Da prostituição em geral e em particular em relação ao Rio de Janeiro* (1872), which includes a section on “sodomy,” and Viveiros de Castros’s *Atentado ao Pudor* (1894), see Green 78–84. See also Domingos Pinheiro Firmino’s *O Androfilismo* (1898).

the post-abolition Brazilian city. One can only speculate whether and to what extent he, as a seemingly unconditional admirer of positive criminology, endorsed Lombroso's condemnation of punishment, and physical punishment in particular; the same is true of his position regarding *responsibility* as it relates to free will. One can only affirm that, in Caminha's words, Amaro is a *born degenerate* ("degenerado nato"), "not responsible for the baseness that his organism commits until he murders a friend, the victim of his instincts."

Caminha's critique of Amaro's treatment while in the navy is consistent with his abolitionist past (see Beattie, "Navy Officer"). His graphic depiction of Amaro's physical punishment brings scenes of slavery to the reader's mind, and the protagonist even laments: "marinheiro e negro cativo, afinal de contas, vêm a ser a mesma cousa" (42; "a sailor and a black slave—in the long run, they come down to the same thing," Lacey 80). The 1824 Constitution, the 1830 Criminal Code (Código Criminal do Império), and the 1832 Code (Código de Processo Criminal de Primeira Instância) authorized death by hanging and punishment in galleys or forced labor; although the flogging of free citizens was outlawed, a law of exception permitted the flogging of slaves until 1888. Navy troops could legally be flogged beginning in 1873, and, although this form of punishment was abolished with the proclamation of the Republic, it was reinstated a year later (1890) due to repeated insubordination within the navy ("Navy Officer" 96).<sup>15</sup> Peter Beattie, assuming Amaro to be a victim of military impressment, has suggested that Caminha was also critical of this practice, which "resembled the methods of African and Indian slavers" ("Navy Officer" 96). This does not mean, however, that slavery, flogging, or anything in Amaro's past explains or causes his actions, as Beattie seems to conclude ("Conflicting Penile Codes" 72), or that Bom Crioulo's "'inverted' sex drive results from the inhumanity of slavery compounded by impressment and flogging" ("Navy Officer" 100). As I hope to have demonstrated, his "crimes" do not derive from the social environment alone, but are instead congenital predispositions, just as his homosexuality may be "mysteriously" linked to alcohol, temper, language, race, etc., and only *avored* by specific circumstances. For Caminha what is at stake is the fact (once again in line with Lombroso's theories) that flogging is not merely cruel and humiliating, but an ineffectual deterrent.

Caminha wrote *Bom Crioulo* in the aftermath of the emancipation and, equally important, following the subsequent introduction of the 1890 Penal Code. The code was apparently modeled on the 1889 Zanardelli Criminal Code in Italy, which, to Lombroso's dismay, did not adopt the principles of the new criminal science. Among other things, the new Brazilian penal code eliminated the death penalty and introduced correctional imprisonment. Sodomy and homosexuality, never criminalized in post-independence Brazil, remained outside of the new 1890 Penal Code, although James Green has shown that there were other ways of disciplining them, such as punishing anything that could be considered an "ultrage público ao pudor" "offense against social mores," (Green 56–58). The Penal Code was immediately followed by the introduction of the Naval Penal Code ("Código Penal da Armada"), which was created in 1891 but not approved until 1899 (Beattie, "Conflicting Penile Codes" 73) and corresponded to the spirit and,

<sup>15</sup> The practice ultimately led to the 1910 riots (Revolta da Chibata) by mostly black sailors against Navy officers fifteen years after the publication of the novel. For a recent study of the revolt, see Love.

in most cases, the letter of the Republican Penal Code. It defined imputable crimes as actions and omissions committed with criminal intention or due to neglect, imprudence, or incompetence (see Câmara dos Deputados). At the same time, the Navy Penal Code explicitly defined as non-criminals children under nine years old, persons between nine and fourteen who acted “without discernment,” and persons who, “por imbecilidade nativa, ou enfraquecimento senil, forem absolutamente incapazes de imputação” (Art. 21 §3; due to innate imbecility or senile weakening were absolutely incapable of being imputable) or found themselves “em estado de completa privação de sentidos e de inteligência no momento de cometer o crime” (Art. 21 §4; in complete privation of their senses and intelligence at the moment of committing the crime). The Code also provided the terms of conviction for these non-criminals: an individual deemed free from all culpability “resulting from mental affectedness, will be delivered to his family or apprehended to a hospital for the insane, if his mental state so demands for the security of the public” (Art. 23), while guilty individuals between nine and fourteen years old who acted “with discernment” will be sent to disciplinary establishments until they reach the age of seventeen. However, in addition to forced labor, imprisonment, demotion, and retirement, the Naval Code also reintroduced the death penalty (Art. 139), which was absent from the Republican Penal Code, as well as a four-year term of imprisonment for crimes against “honestidade e bons costumes” (“honesty and good customs”), such as “inversion of the sexual instincts,” corruption of minors, and “crimes against nature” (Art. 148).

Although Caminha’s criticisms are aimed at the Navy’s excesses, his concern with punishment, physical and otherwise, is much broader and has clear legal-scientific implications. It is important to keep in mind that what Lombroso and his followers called the “impure origin of justice” was the atavistic persistence of *retaliation* (the law of “an eye for an eye”) that has defined “justice” in civilized societies. According to Lombroso, this primitive sentiment is widespread among the general population—he cites the practice of lynching in the U.S. as an example—and is responsible for the law’s unequal and often capricious application, as well as decisions to wage war against weaker nations. He believes that, although the primitive “spirit of revenge” is most prominent among the lower classes, it survives in the modern judicial system and particularly in what he considers to be its most uncertain and corruptible institution: the jury. By vesting the expert with the authority to identify the born criminal as pathological or degenerated, criminal anthropology proposes the born criminal’s *perpetual* detention rather than punishment for the criminal or compensation for the victim (HC 95–97). Retaliative justice derives from the capricious power of the despot and the law’s unequal and arbitrary application against the rich or poor. Lombroso also argues that those who opposed the new emphasis on the pathology of the criminal did so precisely because they wanted emotional or material compensation for personal injury.

Thus, at the end of *Bom Crioulo* the narrator seems to direct the reader to consider the fate of the criminal, who is being escorted away by the police, with concern and a certain degree of compassion. James Green (87) has pointed out that the criminologist Viveiros de Castro looked at the homosexual with this same kind of ambivalent compassion, but in his later work Lombroso designates different disciplinary measures and penalties for occasional and born homosexuals. For the occasional homosexual, whose behavior is provoked by living in barracks,

schools, or under conditions of involuntary celibacy, Lombroso believes that conditional sentences suffice. Born homosexuals, whose condition is not determined by any particular cause, represent a greater threat, particularly to youth, insofar as they are like a “contagious ferment” that can spread through imitation. As they are themselves the cause of occasional homosexuality, the born homosexual should be sequestered as early as possible (*Cause et Remèdes* 509), and Lombroso does not exclude the death penalty as an option, even if this seems both extreme and, like any other form of punishment, a “relative” form of justice (518).

In *Bom Crioulo*, Caminha goes no further than to indicate the protagonist’s lack of responsibility and attribute the cause of his crimes to his “organism” and “instincts,” since, as the narrator states, “a natureza pode mais do que a vontade humana” (32; “nature herself is stronger than human will,” Lacey 64). At the time, debates concerning criminal responsibility revolved largely around the issue of free will and the accountability of certain types of criminals such as the insane or children. In this context, the novel implicitly asks whether blacks are able to decide their own destinies. Should the good-hearted Amaro, a semi-primitive, child-like victim of degeneration, be held legally responsible for his crimes, if (as the criminologists believed) his crimes cannot be attributed to his decision-making power or moral discernment? Or should he be judged (and likely acquitted) in light of Article 27 of the 1890 Penal Code, which defined as non-criminals both those whose “native imbecility or civil debilitation” rendered them “incapable of imputability” (§3) and those who find themselves “in complete state of privation of the senses and intelligence in the act of committing the crime” (§4)?

If, as the legal establishment believed, blacks were inferior or at least closer to primitive societies and therefore prone to savage instincts, could they be held responsible for breaking the law? Could a racist judge, in short, declare a black criminal unimputable on the same basis as an insane criminal? What if one were to claim that non-whites are incapable of deciding between good and evil? The school of positive criminology, by redirecting the focus from the nature and circumstances of the crime to the nature of the criminal, offered a confusing answer that challenged the principles of free will and equality before the law. Thus, the State, through the judge and with the assistance of the doctor, had to decide whether a criminal was dangerous, independent of his intentions or the circumstances of the crime. In this way, the insane, who were incapable of self-determination under the new Penal Code, could be found both *morally* unimputable and *legally* responsible, and subjected, accordingly, to the most severe measures: namely, indefinite detention (Peres and Touro Filho 342). At stake is whether the recently emancipated black man can determine his own fate, or whether the nation’s “civilized” Euro-descendants should decide his destiny for him.

In *As Raças e as Responsabilidades Penais no Brasil* (*Races and Penal Responsibilities in Brazil*, 1894), published around the time Caminha was writing *Bom Crioulo*, Raimundo Nina Rodrigues (1862–1906)—Brazil’s most renowned criminologist and, according to Lombroso, one of the apostles of criminal anthropology in the New World (Correa 82)—explicitly addresses the issue of criminal responsibility and the principle of equality before the law as it pertained to racial difference. He argues that legal equality could not and should not be assumed in light of Brazil’s demographic and climactic heterogeneity: “Posso iludir-me, mas estou profundamente convencido de que a adoção de um código único para toda a república foi



um erro grave que atentou grandemente contra os princípios mais elementares da fisiologia humana” (176; I might be deluding myself, but I am profoundly convinced that the adoption of a single code for the whole of the Republic was a serious mistake that was a great threat to the elementary principles of human physiology) (see, also, Alvarez 695 and Linhares da Silva). Rodrigues bases his critique of free will on Gabriel Tarde’s *La Philosophie pénale* (*Penal Philosophy*, 1890), according to which free will was particularly dangerous because “perante os tribunais, torna-se cada vez mais fácil ao advogado, com os escritos dos alienistas em punho, demonstrar o caráter irresistível das impulsões criminosas que arrastaram o seu cliente; e, tanto para o jurado como para o legislador, a irresponsabilidade do acusado é a consequência” (qtd. in Rodrigues 72; before tribunals it becomes increasingly easier for the attorney, with the writing of psychiatrists in hand, to demonstrate the irresistible character of criminal impulses which dragged down their clients; and, for the jury as well as the legislator, the consequence will be their unaccountability). According to Tarde, adding the race factor to the study of legal responsibility in Brazil would further complicate the dilemma confronting the classical school of criminology: “ou punir sacrificando o principio do livre arbítrio, ou respeitar esse principio, detrimendo a segurança social” (73; either one will punish, thus sacrificing the principle of free will, or one will respect such a principle in detriment of public safety). Thus, he concludes, whenever the “civilized” and the “semi-civilized” are confronted in Brazil, “a igualdade política não pode compensar a desigualdade moral e física” (87; political equality cannot compensate for physical and moral inequality). Indeed, given the diversity of racial demographics and racial mixing in Brazil,

Pode-se exigir que todas estas raças distintas respondam por seus atos perante a lei com igual plenitude de responsabilidade penal? . . . Por ventura pode-se conceder que a consciência do direito e do dever que tem essas raças inferiores, seja a mesma que possui a raça branca civilizada?—ou que, pela simples convivência e submissão, possam aquelas adquirir, de um momento para outro, essa consciência, a ponto de se adoptar para elas conceito de responsabilidade penal idêntico ao dos italianos, a quem fomos copiar o nosso código? (111–12)

Can we expect that all distinct races respond to their acts before the law with equal and full penal responsibility? . . . Can one by any chance concede that the consciousness of rights and duties of these inferior races are the same as that of the white civilized race?—or that, by merely living together and submitting they can acquire, from one moment to another, that consciousness, to the point of adopting for themselves a concept of penal responsibility identical to the Italian, from which we copied our penal code?

Because he laments the improbability that the white population will ever be predominant in all regions of Brazil (90), Rodrigues is unequivocal in proposing for each region of the country a different penal code based on the diverse racial formations and constituencies that result from varied patterns of miscegenation. Furthermore, in opposition to the classical principle of equality, the judicial system should treat different races differently since, in spite of the obvious examples of exceptional intelligence in a few men of color (122), he doubts that all races are capable of civilization and therefore moral judgment. This would demand treating the criminality of non-whites according to distinct criteria: “A dificuldade real está toda em avaliar a responsabilidade do índio e do negro já incorporados à nossa sociedade, gozando dos mesmo direitos e colaborando conosco na civilização do país” (114; The real difficulty lies in evaluating the responsibility of the Indian and the Negro who are already incorporated in our society

and who already enjoy the same rights and collaborate with us in the civilization of our country). Rodrigues believes the law should incorporate the commonly accepted analogies that compare descendants of Africans to children and primitive men: “O negro não tem mau caráter, mas somente caráter instável como a criança, e como na criança—mas com esta diferença que ele já atingiu a maturidade dos seu desenvolvimento fisiológico—a sua instabilidade é a consequência de uma cerebração incompleta” (123; The Negro does not have a bad character, but only the unstable character of a child, and like the child—only with the difference that he has already attained the maturity of his physiological development—his instability is the consequence of an incomplete cerebration). At the same time, Rodrigues argues that the “negro crioulo” “conservou vivaz os instintos brutais do africano: é rixoso, violento nas suas impulsões sexuais, muito dado a embriaguez e esse fundo de caráter imprime o seu cunho na criminalidade colonial atual” (124; has kept alive the brutal instincts of the African: he is competitive, violent in his sexual impulses and prone to intoxication, and this foundation of his character imprints on him the mark of present colonial criminality). Thus, he concludes: “negros e índios, de todo irresponsáveis em estado selvagem, têm direitos incontestáveis a uma responsabilidade atenuada” (130; blacks and Indians, entirely irresponsible in the savage state, have unquestionable rights to attenuated responsibility).

It is important to realize that, for Rodrigues in particular and the criminologists in general, an individual’s level of moral discernment is congenital; social conditions play a role only to a lesser extent, and conscious decision-making and self-determination are not relevant. As noted above, because Lombroso believed crimes could be attributed to atavism, degeneration, epilepsy, moral insanity, alcoholism, and so on, punishment should depend on the type of criminal—his degree of dangerousness or, according to Raffaele Garofalo’s neologism, his “temibilità” (Darmon 147)—rather than the nature of the crime. For example, murder (or, for that matter, homosexuality) should not always receive the same punishment (as the classical principle of proportionality requires), but should be treated according to the threat the murderer represents to society and the extent to which his criminal behavior is likely to recur. However, Rodrigues translates Lombroso’s more eclectic etiology of crime into a strictly racial paradigm and tries to reconcile it with aspects of the classical school in order to distinguish between whites and non-whites regarding free will. He argues that in their original primitive state Africans were not responsible for their crimes, because, like children, they had no moral sense or ability to distinguish between good and evil. In a semi-civilized state, however, they should be partially accountable (or have attenuated imputability). But, ultimately, the crimes (like any actions) of non-whites do not, unlike the crimes of “sane” Euro-descendant adults, result from volition.

Although, beginning in 1838, French law gave psychiatrists the power to send those considered insane to mental institutions (Darmon 128)—a trend that Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis would fictionalize in his farcical novella *O Alienista* (*The Psychiatrist*, 1882)—Brazilian psychiatrists did not have this power (Peres and Nery Filho 341). Rodrigues, however, proposes eliminating mental institutions; instead, white legislators and scientists should take on the task of protecting white civilization against anti-social acts (crimes) committed by both whites and non-whites, regardless of whether non-whites understand their crimes to be

mere acts of resistance or survival (170). Although non-whites' crimes should be classified as involuntary acts, legislation should not in any way excuse or forgive them. Rodrigues tries to limit any undesired (and, from his point of view, potentially dangerous) consequences based on his own conclusions by attenuating the moral irresponsibility of blacks and Indians by a change in their legal age. In a strange twist of reasoning, he argues that in both primitive societies and "inferior races," individuals tend to become "adults" earlier than civilized peoples: "A precocidade mental é a regra, e infelizmente também a precocidade da sua decadência muito de perto a acompanha. A um distinto professor isto fez dizer satiricamente—que somos um povo de meninos prodígios e homens toupeiras" (180; Mental precocity is the rule, and unfortunately the precocity of their decay closely follows it. A distinguished professor has said satirically that we are a people of prodigious children and grown up idiots [lit. "moles"]). This alleged precociousness is thus followed by arrested development. As Mozart Linhares da Silva has pointed out, and as paradoxical as it may seem, Rodrigues ultimately defends the imputability of non-white minors, in contrast to the unimputability of white minors (37). For him, blacks and Indians attain a certain degree of discernment earlier than whites, and that makes them (at least partially) imputable and therefore potentially correctable at an earlier age. In short, Rodrigues proposes the abandonment of the principle of the *uniformity* of free will in different races, greater surveillance of non-whites, and, in line with Lombroso's school, the substitution of educational methods for prisons (209).

Moreover, the issue of the distinct imputability of different races becomes further complicated when racial mixing is considered. Rodrigues cites and endorses the literary critic Sílvio Romero, who affirmed that "todo brasileiro é mestiço, se não no sangue, pelo menos nas ideias" (89; every Brazilian is a mestizo, if not in his blood, at least in his ideas; cf. Freyre 282). In order to explain the widespread criminality of mixed-race individuals, the criminologist shifts his argument: instead of asserting that the races are at different stages of evolution, as he did for blacks and Indians, he turns to the pathology of degeneration as it was believed to affect mixed-race subjects. From a medical and legal point of view, he rigidly categorizes the types and levels of miscegenation and their corresponding levels of moral responsibility: "mestiços superiores (perfeitamente equilibrados e responsáveis); mestiços degenerados (uns total, outros parcialmente irresponsáveis); mestiços comuns (responsabilidade atenuada)" (167; superior mestizos [perfectly balanced and accountable]; degenerated mestizos [some completely, others partially unaccountable]; common mestizos [attenuated responsibility]). Different shades of mixed-race subjects are thus located on a spectrum ranging from born to occasional criminals; accordingly, they should have different rights of citizenship and accountability (see Correa 140–97).

### Othello in Brazil

Given the growing concern with urban crime and the fate of the black man in the aftermath of the abolition of slavery, it is not surprising that the figure of Othello, in various versions, appropriations, and adaptations, would become emblematic, with the play, itself, possibly the most frequently staged Shakespearean

play in nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro. As Daniela Rhinow has shown, a number of Italian and Portuguese theatre companies brought *Othello* to Brazil, especially between 1885 and 1895.<sup>16</sup> Among the actors who played Othello in Rio, Rhinow lists the Italians Tommaso Salvini (1871) and Ernesto Rossi (1871); the Portuguese Álvaro Filipe Ferreira (1886) and Eduardo Brazão (1887); and, again, the Italians Giovanni Emanuel (1887, 1891, 1896), Andrea Maggi (1891), Enrico Cuneo (1894), and Ermete Noelli (1895). Other versions of *Othello* included operas by Gioachino Rossini (1848, known as *Othello or the African from Venice*) and Giuseppe Verdi (1889, 1894), as well as several parodic versions by local authors.<sup>17</sup> It is difficult not to see this post-abolition fascination with Othello as another manifestation of the overwhelming concern with race in Brazil. Indeed, critics at the time often referred to the “paixões ocultas e selvagens de Othelo” (Rhinow 2: 278; hidden and savage passions of Othello) and his “degradação mental” (253; mental degradation). In 1887 a Portuguese critic, responding to one of the Portuguese stagings of *Othello* that was then playing in Brazil, concluded: “Aquele carneiro preto, como lhe chama o próprio Shakespeare, aquele doente que precisa ser estudado patologicamente, como aconselha Francisco Hugo, não é para a nossa educação teatral nem para nossa organização” (qtd. in Rhinow 113; That black sheep, as Shakespeare himself calls him, that sick man who needs to be studied pathologically, as Francisco Hugo has advised, is not meant for our theatrical education or organization). And in 1891 a Brazilian critic called Othello a “negro bondoso” (119; good negro), a term similar to the nickname Caminha would give his protagonist four years later.

It should thus come as no surprise that Aldolfo Caminha’s portrait of an uncontrollable black man whose jealous impulses lead him to commit a crime explicitly refers to Shakespeare’s protagonist: “Era um misto de ódio, de amor e de ciúme, o que ele experimentava nesses momentos . . . Daí também o ódio ao grumete, um ódio surdo, mastigado, brutal como as cóleras de Otelo” (71; “What he felt in those moments was a mixture of hatred, love and jealousy . . . And from the desire was born also his hatred of the cabin-boy, a hatred as unheeding, as brutal, as deeply meditated as the wrath of Othello,” 127). Further, Amaro’s name itself may be derived from “mouro” (moor) (see de Sá Barbarosa’s introduction to *Bom Crioulo* 10). Likewise, Rodrigues associates Othello’s passions with the pathological and unimputable criminal impulses of Africans: “O mouro, que uma explosão de ciúmes, violenta e tempestuosa, requeria em *Othelo*, não é mais do que o elo-

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<sup>16</sup> Rhinow’s doctoral dissertation presents an extensive survey of such adaptations, from the neo-classical versions staged in blackface by João Caetano to Shakespearean plays or operatic versions staged by foreign companies, as well as local appropriations of the play’s themes. However, the author quickly dismisses race as a factor in the popularity of *Othello* in Brazil (10). The appendix to the thesis includes invaluable documentation regarding the contemporary reception of *Othello* in the Brazilian press, including a critic who comments that the Italian actor Giovanni Emanuel “apresentou um Otelo natural e, por vezes, reconhecedor da inferioridade da sua raça” (105; presented a natural Othello who often recognized the inferiority of his race). It is also worth recalling that Sebastião Bernardes de Souza Prata, the most renowned Brazilian actor of African descent of the twentieth century, was known as Grande Otelo.

<sup>17</sup> Among the parodic Brazilian adaptations that Rhinow studies are Martins Pena’s *Os Ciúmes de um Pedestre* (1845); Gonçalves Dias’s *Leonor de Mendonça* (1846); Joaquim Manuel de Macedo’s *O Novo Othelo* (1860); and *O Caboclo* (1886).

quente atestado dos conhecimentos psicológicos de Shakespeare” (126; The Moor in *Othello*, for whom a violent and tempestuous explosion of jealousy was inevitable, is nothing but the eloquent certificate of Shakespeare’s psychological knowledge).

Although many critics have identified Shakespeare’s overwhelming presence in Machado de Assis’s works, particularly *Othello*’s centrality to *Dom Casmurro* (1899), which was published only a few years after *Bom Crioulo* and Rodrigues’s first book (see, for example, C. and E. Gomes, Almeida, and Passos), most critics have ignored or dismissed the relevance of *Othello*’s blackness. Helen Caldwell, in *The Brazilian Othello of Machado de Assis*, may be the only critic to have addressed the possibility that *Casmurro* is mixed-race: she suggests that the protagonist’s nickname, *Casmurro*, evokes “mouro” (125) and argues that his youthful nickname, *Bento*, could refer to “a Negro known as St. Benedict the Moor” (41). She adds, moreover, that it is possible that “Bento’s mother and grandmother had Negro blood . . . a realistic touch, for the first Brazilian colonists brought no women with them and had children by their Negro slaves” (43). One cannot help but wonder if Machado, who was mulatto and epileptic, uses his tale of jealousy and uncertain paternity to play not only with the rhetoric of reproduction and the alleged infertility of mixed-raced subjects, but also with the stereotypes of the jealous, atavistic, demented black man (and indeed, as Caldwell has also suggested, Machado meticulously describes the character’s jealousy as a pathology).

In these works, all written around 1895, the distance that separates the normal from the abnormal is the same as that between the savage and the civilized, homosexuals and heterosexuals, the anti-social type and the good citizen of the newly proclaimed Republic. The challenge for their authors, who tend to oppose prisons and punishment, is how, then, to discipline those at the criminal pole of the pathological spectrum (which, in the case of Caminha, Amaro exemplifies). In Rodrigues’s case, this category includes not only the born criminal, but also all of the occasional criminals—including occasional homosexuals and, should we also say, occasional blacks (the whole spectrum of mulattoes)?—who also appear in Caminha’s novel.

There is no doubt that Caminha’s work and its reception involves both *homo-social* and *colonial* desire. However, I argue that the novel is less ambivalent or ambiguous than we may want it to be, even if it remains relatively transgressive. To read *Bom Crioulo* in the context of *fin-de-siècle* criminology and what I have called *Othello*’s pathologies, rather than celebrate its explicit and supposedly benevolent (or ambivalent) approach to homosexuality, is not simply to be faithful to the work and its historical context. It is also to examine the reproduction of stereotypes and assumptions regarding the immutability of race as well as sexuality. The allegedly positive, modern, or even ambivalent representation of interracial homosexuality in *Bom Crioulo* that has led to the novel’s inclusion in the canon of gay world literature risks confirming biological fatalism in relation to both sexuality and race at the same time that—in the eyes of its proponents—it seems to redeem the homosexual from stigmatization.

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