


Chapter 5

Cinebiography: Eça de Queiroz as a Character

Filomena Antunes Sobral

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3679-7894>

CI&DEI, Polytechnic Institute of Viseu, Portugal & CECC, Portuguese Catholic University, Portugal

ABSTRACT

*José Maria de Eça de Queiroz, a seminal figure in Portuguese literature, has been the subject of numerous cinematic and television adaptations, both within and beyond Portugal. Among these, the 2020 film *O Nosso Cônsul em Havana* (Our Consul in Havana) is particularly noteworthy for positioning the writer himself as its central character. This chapter offers a critical analysis of the film's dramatization of Eça de Queiroz, situating it within the broader literary, cultural, and political milieu of nineteenth-century Portugal. Employing a qualitative methodology, the study integrates a sectoral narrative framework with film studies to examine the construction of the author's persona on screen. Special attention is given to the depiction of Eça de Queiroz's humanist and diplomatic traits, dimensions often overshadowed by his literary legacy. By foregrounding these aspects, the analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of the biographical cinematic genre and its capacity to reveal nuanced interpretations of historical figures through fictional representation.*

INTRODUCTION

José Maria de Eça de Queiroz's (1845-1900) legacy endures not only through the reading of his oeuvre, its inclusion in school curricula, and various academic studies and critical observations based on his production, but also through adaptations of his narratives, themes, and characters across a wide variety of cultural expressions,

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such as theater, painting, and cinema. In 2020, the writer's biography was brought to the silver screen with the release of the film *Our Consul in Havana* (Francisco Manso, 2020). The film, produced with the support of the Portuguese public broadcaster RTP, focuses on a period of Eça de Queiroz's life, more precisely the beginning of his diplomatic career in Havana, and features Eça de Queiroz himself as the protagonist. The involvement of RTP underscores the national significance of the project and its role in preserving and promoting Portugal's cultural heritage through cinema.

This biographical film brings together fictional characters, some of them inspired by real life, whose destinies cross within the Cuban colonial context and portrays historical facts that bring the discursive construction of nineteenth century Havana to the present day. Therefore, *Our Consul in Havana* is a feature film that adopts the perspective of a biopic in which the main events depicted are based on Eça de Queiroz's life. The motion picture emphasizes the biographical content and simultaneously sets the plot in the 1871-72 era.

The film reveals a lesser-known side of Eça de Queiroz, dramatizing his humanist character and diplomatic profile within the socio-political context of 1871 during the ministerial tenure of the Marquis of Ávila and Bolama³. By this period, Eça de Queiroz was closely associated with a group of Portuguese intellectuals deeply committed to political, social and artistic reforms known as the Coimbra Generation or the Generation of 1970. During this time the group attempted to expose the country's stagnation and conservative mentality. The young intellectuals, who called themselves the *Cenáculo*, organized a series of public lectures to discuss and promote modern ideas which came from Europe. Eça de Queiroz made a presentation about new literature at the Lisbon Casino, defending Realist principles as the literary norm.

Around 1871-72, diplomatic relations between Portugal and Cuba were marked by a series of turbulent events that were affecting the Iberian Peninsula and Spain in particular. That turmoil negatively impacted the political stability of the Caribbean colony. In 1872, in Havana, political problems such as the Chinese emigrants entering the country through the port of Macau, the existence of slave colonialism, and the anti-colonial struggle gained relevance.

This chapter aims to analyze and critically assess the biographical portrayal of José Maria de Eça de Queiroz in the film *Our Consul in Havana*. It focuses on understanding how the film depicts Eça de Queiroz's profile, particularly highlighting his role as a humanist within the historical and cultural context of 19th-century Havana. Hence, the guiding question for the study is: How does the biographical film *Our Consul in Havana* represent Eça de Queiroz, and what are the implications of this portrayal for understanding his legacy as a diplomat?

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