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Júlia Lopes de Almeida actively wrote and published novels, collections of short stories, plays, and newspaper columns for over forty years. Her novels, widely read and highly acclaimed during her life, established her as one of the leading writers of her generation. By the time of her death in 1934, however, her work was falling into obscurity. In Brazilian literary histories written between 1940 and 1987, she appears only a handful of times, and the mentions are merely perfunctory. Within the last fifteen years, however, Brazilian scholars have renewed their interest in her work and four of her novels have been re-published.

What is still lacking, however, is an in-depth analysis of Almeida’s œuvre as a whole. This thesis seeks to begin the task of adding to the comparative analysis by examining the progression of a common theme in several books. The purpose of this thesis is to evaluate the contribution made by Júlia Lopes de Almeida to Brazilian literature. Her impact on, and reflection of, her contemporary society, her evaluation by
subsequent generations, and her rescue from obscurity by recent scholars all form part of the discussion of her merit as an author.
INTRODUCTION
CONTINUING THE RESCUE OF JÚLIA LOPES DE ALMEIDA

In an interview with novelist Júlia and her husband, Portuguese poet Filinto de Almeida (1857-1945), the leading Brazilian journalist of the time, João do Rio (pseudonym of Paulo Barreto, 1881-1921), comments, “Ha muita gente que considera D. Julia o primeiro romancista brasileiro,” to which Filinto, one of the founding members of the Academia Brasileira de Letras, responds, “Pois não é? Nunca disse isso a ninguém, mas ha muito que o penso. Não era eu quem devia estar na Academia, era ella.”¹ Filinto de Almeida was the first, but not the last, to suggest that his election to the Academy was due to the institution’s inability to admit his wife, Júlia Lopes de Almeida (1862-1934).

This exchange is noteworthy above all because it indicates the tremendous critical and public regard that Júlia Lopes de Almeida had earned. Rio remarks that she is considered the top novelist (o primeiro romancista), not the leading female novelist (a primeira romancista), of her era. Despite the lack of educational and professional opportunities for women in late nineteenth-century Brazil, Almeida began her career at a young age (24) and achieved great critical acclaim during her lifetime, being celebrated in both Brazil and Europe.

As was the case with perhaps only one other woman, Carmem Dolores (pseudonym of Emília Moncorvo Bandeiro de Melo, d. 1911), D. Júlia was recognized as a rightful member of the era’s literary elite, only accidentally distinguished by her sex from almost all her colleagues. (Needell 213)

¹ This citation was taken from the 1994 edition of João do Rio’s O momento literário, p. 29, which adheres to the orthography of the original 1908 publication.
The latter half of Rio’s exchange with Filinto de Almeida, however, reveals that Júlia Lopes de Almeida did indeed suffer the injustice of the era’s gender limitations. Despite being a member of the literary elite, Almeida was never awarded her rightful seat in the Brazilian Academy of Letters. This inequity did not affect the production or reception of Almeida’s work during her lifetime. She wrote and published novels, short stories, plays, etiquette manuals, and newspaper columns for over forty years (1886-1934). Her inclusion in Brazilian literary histories of the time attests to her place in Brazilian letters. By the end of her life, Almeida was certainly the most prominent Brazilian woman writer, as well as one of the most highly respected writers, irrespective of gender, of her time.

After Almeida’s death, however, her work quickly fell into relative obscurity, as changing critical attitudes caused scholars to dismiss the traditional authors of Almeida’s era and focus more narrowly on the Modernist generation and beyond. Between 1940-1987, Júlia Lopes de Almeida all but disappeared from Brazilian letters. When she was mentioned in literary histories, a few of her books were praised for their quality but she was generally criticized as a writer who did not rise to greatness. For most scholars, Júlia Lopes de Almeida was included in a period of Brazilian literary history (roughly 1880s-1910s) that revealed no great talents in fiction, other than that of Machado de Assis (1839-1908) and Lima Barreto (1881-1922). The marked difference between the recognition Almeida received during her lifetime and the scarcity of scholarship on her corpus during the five decades following her death suggests a need for critical redress of Almeida’s œuvre.
In the late twentieth century, a new interest in the resgate, or “rescue,” of forgotten or excluded voices, primarily female or minority authors, again changed scholarly approaches to Almeida and her writing. In 1987, her literary legacy was revealed to a new, contemporary readership with the republication of one of her novels as part of Editôra Presença’s “Coleção de Resgate.” While not original in the undertaking, the publisher clearly defines resgate: “recuperar o patrimônio literário de nosso país com a publicação de obras esgotadas, inéditas ou raras, de fundamental importância para o conhecimento da cultura brasileira” (Almeida, Correio da roça, series page). Feminist presses and gender-studies scholars began to reevaluate Almeida’s contribution in the spirit of the resgate, acknowledging that she was an important writer who had too long been forgotten. Since 1987, four of Almeida’s novels have been republished. Contemporary scholars have criticized her writing for a perceived conservatism regarding women’s issues, but the most promising aspect of the resgate is that it allows for new approaches and judgements of her work.

Júlia Lopes de Almeida, in advocating the publication of a book of fellow writer Carmem Dolores’ crônicas—brief (500-word), light newspaper columns focusing on daily issues and events—affirmed the long-term value of the availability of one’s work:

Há, porém, uma outra homenagem a prestar a essa escritora: a de lhe enfeixarem as crônicas melhores em um volume bem editado, bem cuidado e em que figurem o seu retrato e a sua biografia. Será a única maneira de não deixar morrer com ela a maior e a melhor parte de sua obra.

E é do que se deve tratar agora, que tudo o mais são palavras que o vento leva para o destino ignorado a que leva todas as coisas atrás das quais ninguém corre . . . E a figura desta escritora original, ardente e vigorosa, merece ficar em destaque permanente na galeria dos nossos escritores, de todos os tempos. (qtd. by Vasconcelos 9)
Almeida’s wish was fulfilled eighty-eight years after Dolores’ death, since Dolores had fallen into obscurity much as Almeida had. What Almeida could not imagine, when she wrote about Dolores in 1910, was that her own work, produced as bound books as opposed to Dolores’ ephemeral newspaper crônicas (one can almost envision the newspapers being swept away by the wind “para o destino ignorado a que leva todas as coisas atrás das quais ninguém corre”), could fall into disregard as easily as Dolores’ writing. The bound novels that comprise the majority and the best of Almeida’s body of work were themselves whisked away by winds of critical change, and only with their republication has Almeida’s legacy been revived and expanded.

Almost echoing Editora Presença’s statement, the jacket copy of Carmem Dolores’ Crônicas: 1905-1910 reads, “A Coleção Fluminense vem editando e reeditando obras raras ou esgotadas e aquelas inéditas de reconhecido valor no meio cultural.” The editors also recognize “a possibilidade de rever o Rio de Janeiro sob um olhar feminino contemporâneo, nos pareceu inusitada, como também supreendente sua visão crítica dos problemas sociais daquela época” (jacket copy, emphasis added). It is this relatively recent critical interest in women’s point-of-view that has allowed the rescue of Almeida’s books, which preceded that of the books of many other female writers presumably because of her pre-existing prominence in Brazilian letters.

The immense importance of the republication of Almeida’s novels, then, cannot be overemphasized. According to Almeida’s own logic, the publication of the best part of her œuvre—and several of the republished novels were admired during her lifetime as her strongest work—has ensured her permanent place in Brazilian literary history. However, what is missing from this renewed interest in Almeida is a thorough study of
her body of work. New editions have analytical, critical introductions focused on the specific texts. Such scholars as Peggy Sharpe, Darlene Sadlier, and Elódia Xavier have written articles or chapters on individual books or stories. However, there has never been a serious, in-depth analysis of Almeida’s repertory of prose fiction. In focusing on single works, recent scholars have not assessed recurring themes and her multi-faceted presentation of complex subjects. This thesis seeks to begin the task of adding to the comparative analysis by examining the progression of a common theme in several books.

The present analysis concerns six novels. Two of the novels, A família Medeiros (1891) and A falência (1901), were chosen because they were esteemed during Almeida’s lifetime and in the years following her death. The remaining four are those novels that have been republished in recent years: A viúva Simões (1897, republished in 1999), A intrusa (1908, republished in 1994), Correio da roça (1913, republished in 1987), and A Silveirinha (1914, republished in 1997).2 These novels all depict family life among elite Brazilians and are linked by the theme of family upheaval, which can be explored via the characters’ reactions to several key issues and events, on both the national and the personal levels, that structure the novels. To complement the analysis of these six primary books, a sui generis collection of dramatic monologues and dialogues, Eles e elas (1910), will be included in this analysis. This work maintains a relationship to the theme of family upheaval through its unique mode of examining related issues through intimate reflections on marital relationships. Although not specifically acclaimed during her life nor reprinted after her death, this collection further underscores Almeida’s constant concern with the complexities and turmoil of private family life.

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2 Elódia Xavier has written a new Introduction for A falência, scheduled to be released in 2002 by Editóra Mulheres.
Júlia Lopes de Almeida’s books, depictions of contemporary family life, are intrinsically linked to the social, political, and economic conditions of the era in which she produced them. Hence, Chapter 1 begins with the historical background necessary to understand Almeida’s work in its appropriate contexts. In addition, Chapter 1 includes a discussion of the literary tradition—especially the central trends of Romanticism, Realism, and Naturalism—that preceded Almeida. The general topics she selected, the specific issues she explored, the larger realities she sought to represent – all of these choices were made within the perimeters of erudite Brazilian culture of the late nineteenth century. While Chapter 1 focuses first on society and then on literature, we must understand that the separation of these two spheres is not a natural one. Life and art are interconnected and this relationship is especially pertinent in discussing Almeida, who used her novels to champion women’s education, to question the superficiality of elite culture, and to propose solutions for Brazil’s economic woes.

While literature may not be a direct, undistorted reflection of societal values, those who study a society through its literature convincingly argue that period literature is a good tool for the historian. Ann Pescatello, writing on images of women in the books of Machado de Assis and Jorge Amado (1912-2001), “believes that one of the ways by which a historian can ascertain the attitudes and values of social groups . . . is to examine the literature of that culture” (29). Almeida’s preoccupation with family turmoil makes abundantly clear the role cultural values played in her writing and in her role as an advocate for change.

In addition to providing the historical and biographical background that frames Almeida and her work, Chapter 1 will review critical reception of Almeida since her
death, including the period of relative obscurity (1940-1987) and the period of renewed activity and interest (1987 forward). An examination of Brazilian literary histories between 1940-1987 will reveal a general lack of acknowledgement of Almeida. It is important to stress that, while Almeida tends to be reclaimed by women’s studies scholars and feminist presses, the rediscovery of her work is based on its value from a critical perspective and not only on her gender.

However, the beginnings of feminist sensibilities in Almeida, as explored by recent Brazilian and American scholars, enhances the discussion of family turmoil. Hints of a new awareness of women’s problems, as opposed to a more open affirmation of feminist belief, are examined by some feminist scholars. For example, Elódia Xavier comments that Almeida does not yet manifest a consciousness of woman’s social situation: Almeida “reduplica a ideologia patriarcal e as ‘rainhas do lar’ povoam suas histórias” (Tudo no feminino 15). For their part, Marisa Lajolo and Regina Zilberman, in A formação da leitura no Brasil, find fault with Almeida for her contradictory position in Livro das noivas, a book of etiquette: “ela direciona as leitoras para livros sadios, afirma a missão educativa da mulher dentro do lar e reitera a desconfiança perante as más leituras” (265). An exploration of Almeida’s contradictory images of women and statements regarding their roles will illuminate the question of feminist consciousness as well as our general appreciation of her œuvre. Through close analysis of selected passages and plot elements, Chapters 2-4 will address the significance of the topic of family upheaval as it relates to contemporary feminist concerns. Almeida’s work will be assessed not by late twentieth-century standards, but will be considered within the proper framework of her place as a woman in late nineteenth-century Brazil.
Chapter 2 focuses on three early novels: *A família Medeiros* (1891), *A viúva Simões* (1897), and *A falência* (1901). These novels were written during a particularly turbulent period in Brazil, in the wake of abolition, the birth of the Republic, and the ensuing economic downturns that led to feelings of insecurity throughout the nation. These early books explore, within private realms, the repercussions of external, societal disturbances. *A família Medeiros* personalizes the issue of ending slavery by chronicling the effects of the controversy over abolition, and its impending declaration, on one paulista plantation family. *A viúva Simões* chronicles the transgressions of social expectations of a young widow caught in the strict gender limitations of late nineteenth-century Brazil. *A falência* is the account of the unrealistic optimism and subsequent financial ruin of a coffee baron and his family. Almeida uses this period of national transformation as a method of exploring the strengths and weaknesses of her characters, who must endure changes in their lives caused by large-scale social transformations. It is through their acceptance, or refusal to accept, their new situations that Almeida examines the larger implications of the evolution of Brazilian society.

Chapter 3 departs from the realm of the novels to consider *Eles e elas* (1910), a collection of fictional monologues and dialogues that was published during the middle period of Almeida’s career. The thirty-seven compositions that comprise the book are narrated by spouses reflecting primarily on their complaints regarding marital relationships. *Eles e elas* thus offers Almeida’s most open discussion of gender roles and, specifically, of the difficulties of women’s lives. The major themes of *Eles e elas* are the prominence of domestic labor in women’s lives, the rigid moral standards to which women were expected to adhere, the self-abnegation required of mothers, the familiar
condescension experienced by women in their homes, and the rare opportunities that afforded women independence. Discussion of these topics reveals a remarkable awareness, on Almeida’s part, of women’s issues during her era. The dominant motif of the collection is the oppressive nature of women’s roles within their families and the unhappiness it engenders. Almeida’s method of exposing such infelicity is worthy of special attention, separate from the novels.

Chapter 4 returns to the novel, this time concentrating on three late works: A intrusa (1908), Correio da roça (1913), and A Silveirinha (1914). These novels, written after the major social transformations that marked Almeida’s early years as a writer, focus more intensely on the private family domain. They relate less to larger social transitions and more to familial changes brought about by personal, and not public, events. A intrusa tackles the issue of social climbing, or arrivisme, among the middle and lower-middle class as it touches the life, and affects the perceptions of power, of an elite woman. Correio da roça, an epistolary novel, details the hardships endured by a widow whose financial security died with her husband. A Silveirinha, presumably a light account of intrigue and scandal among the elite summering in Petrópolis, reveals the marital strain caused by stubborn religious zeal and intolerance. Almeida has shifted her basic orientation, and the later novels clearly reflect a different social reality than that of the national tumult during the early novels. The transition from the early to the late period underscores the growth process of Brazil itself; Almeida’s early families are reactive to situations that are beyond their control, but her later families are proactive in generating change once the disturbances have passed.
Almeida’s novels are linked thematically to the historical period in which she produced them. These novels, despite being thoughtful reflections on a difficult transitional era, fell into disregard as critics embraced new literary trends. The resgate of Almeida’s work began with the republishing of her novels by those who sought to revive forgotten voices of Brazil’s literary history. Critical analysis of single texts, generally guided by feminist viewpoint, followed. This comparative analysis of the theme of family upheaval builds upon the serious re-evaluation and fresh critical perspective that has defined the resgate of Júlia Lopes de Almeida’s literary legacy. This thesis, with its thematic, historical approach, takes another step toward increasing our appreciation and understanding of Almeida’s merit as a writer.
CHAPTER 1
SETTING THE SCENE: JÚLIA LOPES DE ALMEIDA’S BRAZIL

Brazil, 1862 Forward

Júlia Lopes de Almeida was born into a Brazil struggling to formulate its national identity. Forty years after independence, Brazil continued to be inextricably linked politically to Portugal and economically to the nations of Western Europe, which, with the United States, provided markets for its goods and the credit (Great Britain) for its development. Brazil had retained its unique status as an empire and was ruled by Brazilian-born Emperor Pedro II, the direct descendant of the Portuguese royal family. Independence had not meant a large-scale break from colonial tradition. Actually, “the transition from colony to independent empire was characterized by an extraordinary degree of political, economic and social continuity” (Bethell 42). Brazil had not followed the violent and politically divisive road toward the formation of an independent republic, instead choosing to forego the “disturbances allegedly endemic in Spanish America” in favor of national stability under a monarch (Graham 138). Beginning with independence in 1822, and still instrumental in 1862, the dominant class’ belief in maintaining national unity and preserving social stability outweighed the inclination toward the creation of a new republic.

Rio de Janeiro, a city of approximately 200,000 inhabitants by 1850 and a busy port for the prosperous sugar and coffee planters of the South, had been the political
center of Portuguese America for nearly one hundred years. By mid-century, the wealth and prominence of the city were contributing to urban improvements such as reliable public transportation, regular garbage collection, operating telegraphs, and gas lighting—all amenities which most of Brazil, predominantly rural, lacked (Needell 25). While certainly not modern nor distinctive compared to European cities, the Brazilian capital offered a quality of life not found in the majority of Brazil.

The vastness of Brazil and its lack of good communications helped to sustain a system of regional economies and alliances that worked against the formation of a unified national economy. Focused on supplying European demands for agricultural products, such as sugar and coffee, Brazilian producers were externally oriented. Brazilian ports were more closely tied to Europe than to other ports in Brazil. “Before steam navigation it took less time to travel from Maranhão to Lisbon than to Rio de Janeiro” (Bethell and Carvalho 48). Telegraph lines linked Brazil to Europe before they linked Brazilian cities to one another (Da Costa 164).

Socially, Brazil was more unified, as the highest ranks closed to ensure their prominence in the strict hierarchical society. There were masses of slave and poor free workers, ruled by the few elite families who controlled the economy, politics, and culture of the country. Most of the politicians in Rio de Janeiro were tied to the landowning elite and had attained their status through an extensive system of patronage. While Brazil lacked economic unity, this patronage system, active through the highest levels of government, fostered political unity among the landed elite from throughout Brazil (Graham 144). Education contributed to the sense of unity: most politicians had studied law at the University of Coimbra in Portugal or its Brazilian successors, the Academies
of Law at São Paulo and Recife. The educated few, unrepresentative of the illiterate masses/majority, determined the course of Brazilian political life and culture.

Only the wealthy families had access to secondary education during this era.

The reasons are unsurprising. Tutors and the few colégios that existed were expensive, were traditionally considered proper to the rich, and, of course, would take children out of the field, the shop, or wherever they were contributing to the economic survival of their families. (Needell 52)

Literacy rates of the time reflect the vast numbers of uneducated Brazilians: throughout the nineteenth century, more than 70% of Brazilians were illiterate (Lajolo and Zilberman 64).

When education was an option, it was an option primarily for boys. In 1872 in Rio de Janeiro, 41.2% of the male population was literate, while only 29.3% of the female population was literate. The lower literacy rates for women reflect both the lack of opportunity and the lower standard of education afforded them. Upper-class girls were often tutored at home. Even those who attended school outside the home were taught “gender-appropriate” subjects: “Normal-school students learned needlecraft along with basic sciences, and those who went on to become teachers were expected to begin preparing girls for wifehood and motherhood during the earliest stages of primary school” (Besse 113-114).

In addition to serving elite males, nineteenth-century Brazilian education was Eurocentric in character. “The teachers were often from the Old World (probably French, or French influenced); the texts were often French or translations from the French; and the acknowledged presumption was that the acquisition of European culture was intended” (Needell 53). Children were taught according to European models that embodied the inherent neocolonial cultural prejudices of the dominant European world
towards those regions considered less civilized (62). This Eurocentric system of education clearly resulted in a Eurocentric culture, which was strengthened by the obvious material and ideological influence of Britain and France among the Brazilian elite throughout the nineteenth century.

Once trained for their respective roles in society, elite men and women were expected to marry. Marriages, traditionally, had been arranged by the parents of elite families. As the nineteenth century progressed, young men and women began to gain the right to choose their marriage partners, but family approval was still required. “Marriage alliances that were cemented principally by love, rather than by links of friendship or kinship between the two families, seemed risky to fathers,” who asserted their rights as final arbiters of marriage choices (Borges 198). Maria Bernardes, writing on images of women by nineteenth-century male authors, notes that in the rare instances when young female characters were allowed independent thought, it was balanced by other forces: “a aprovação da autoridade familiar em questões de casamento lhes é absolutamente indispensável” (77). Marriage served as a means to solidify social and economic status, and elite women traded the authority of their fathers, ever-present in their courtship options, for the authority of their husbands, ever-present in the new families they created (82).

As wives and mothers, elite women began to exercise their own authority in the domestic world in which they functioned. While husbands and fathers played important roles in economic and political decision-making, women administered their households. Trained throughout their lives to do so, women took on the charge of “the household’s running; no petty affair, with the large houses, the number of slaves or servants, the
organization of purchasing, preparing, and serving food, and the attention to menfolk, children, and guests” (Needell 131).

In addition to their roles in the home, elite women entered, albeit on a more limited basis than men, the public sphere. Traditionally, they were taught, as girls, how to play piano, dance, and sing for entertainment at the few social gatherings which they attended. Later in the century, in Rio, women’s access to public domains opened with the establishment of the streetcar, or bond, in 1868. Women were able to leave their homes to shop for luxury goods. With improved urban facilities (e.g., water, sewage, gas) that increased public sanitation and transportation that increased their access, women began to enter the public sphere on a regular basis. “Women began to acquire a greater refinement and greater experience in the outside world hitherto impractical and unnecessary” (Needell 133-135). Women attended the theater and opera, serving as fashionable accompaniments to their husbands. The importance of women’s fashion is apparent in the press of the time, which reported on the performances, but “much more important was the detail it gave of what prominent women were wearing” (78). In addition to perfecting their toilettes, women had to prepare for their new public roles by becoming more familiar with the arts so that they could converse intelligently during the course of these new outings. Women’s access to culture, and to further education, expanded throughout the century. While elite women’s power was still confined to the home, and they were allowed control only in the absence of a male authority figure, elite women’s roles expanded throughout the course of the nineteenth century.
Brazilian Literature

The historical foundations of Brazilian literature are Lusitanian but, by the nineteenth century, Brazilian literature was firmly ensconced in a tradition of following French literary trends. From the early days of the Portuguese colony, elite Brazilians, unable to pursue higher education in a country without universities, traveled to Europe to study. As discussed above, the political traditions and economy of Brazil were also Eurocentric. Moreover, Brazilian intellectuals faced the problem of access to, and distribution of, Brazilian books. In a country with few publishers, few bookstores, books imported from Europe, and a very small literate market, there were few original works published. Not surprisingly, then, the influence of European schools of thought on the young elites is evident in the literature produced in Brazil throughout the nineteenth century.

Additionally, Brazilians who sought a career in writing faced the problem of distribution of their work. There were few presses and books were expensive. An artist could not support himself by his art. The most common option for writers of fiction was to publish their tales in the form of the folhetim, or serial, in a newspaper. The folhetim offered authors the opportunity to practice their profession and to get paid on a regular basis (Lajolo and Zilberman 65, 67). This was true not only in Brazil; many great writers, including Charles Dickens, had their work published in chapters. Because the folhetim was the primary method of distributing one’s work, however, the quality of the narratives varied. There was serious literature, parcelled out in chapters for the newspaper

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1 With the exception of the law schools in Recife and São Paulo, Brazil did not have an institution of higher learning until the first quarter of the twentieth century. The University of Rio de Janeiro, created by official decreee on September 7, 1920, was the first Brazilian university (Azevedo 584).
audience, and the divertido folhetim, a type of harlequin romance that attracted a wide audience (Meyer 308). Writers filled these works with the necessary suspense and melodrama to entice their readers, mostly women, to read them over a period of months. The divertido folhetim can be considered the forerunner to the modern-day novela, or soap opera (Meyer 310).

Just as most bound books came from Europe, the dominant stylistic trends of the era (Romanticism, Realism and Naturalism) all emanated from Europe. While Portuguese literature was still significant in nineteenth-century Brazil, Portugal itself had been following French models since the Enlightenment. By the latter half of the nineteenth century, the term influence did not adequately depict the dominion of French models over literary creation in Brazil. As literary historian José Veríssimo (1857-1916) comments in his Estudos de literatura brasileira, an important early work of criticism, in 1903:

Deve-se dizer da nossa literatura que ella tem vivido muito de imitação; mas isso não é deprecial-a. Todas, as mais ricas, vivem de escambos de ideias e concepções. Somente nós não troçamos, apenas recebemos. Nem podemos pretender a uma literatura original, não tendo, nem podendo ter, um pensamento original, e não sendo nós, sociologicamente, uma organização étnica original. É a França, e, em segundo grau, Portugal que tem fornecido ideias, moldes, inspirações ao nosso pensamento literario. A literatura franceza, aliás a mais rica e formosa do século, é-nos mais familiar talvez que a portuguesa. (17-18, emphasis added)²

Other literary historians resume the argument, noting that Brazilian literary culture historically favored imitation without criticism (Pinto Ferreira 221). French trends were imported to Brazil without extensive questioning of their relevance or being modified significantly to fit Brazilian realities. This emphasis on French culture as it related to

² All citations will adhere to the orthography used in the publication from which the citation was taken.
intellectual and artistic schools of thought contributed to the lack of a well-defined national identity in the arts, just as the Euro-oriented economy contributed to the lack of a unified, national economy.

The first Brazilian novel, *O filho do pescador* (1843), by Antônio Gonçalves Teixeira e Sousa (1812-1861), reflected the ascendance of Romantic prose in Brazil. This work, unremarkable and today virtually unreadable for its inferior style and poor language, also signaled the beginning of the novel and short story in Brazil (Bandeira 83; Putnam 138). Brazilian Romanticism continued to flourish until the late nineteenth century. Romanticism, characterized by exaggerated sentimentality, subjectivity, heroism on a national and personal level, and moralizing idealism continued in Brazil beyond its conclusion in Europe. Literary trends, while imported directly from Europe, did not arrive immediately in Brazil. As literary scholars often note, Flaubert published *Madame Bovary* in 1857, the same year that José de Alencar (1829-1872) published *O guarani* (Pereira 119). Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* marked the emergence of Realism, characterized by its objectivity, which had developed as a reaction against the overpowering sentimentality of Romanticism. The fact that this novel was published in the same year as *O guarani*, representing Brazilian Romanticism at its height, is a vital point in understanding the development of Brazilian arts. Not only were foreign models imitated, but those models suffered up to a twenty year lag before being adopted in Brazil. In terms of trends, literary production in Brazil, and throughout most of Latin America, was certainly not au courant with European developments.

Albeit delayed, Brazilian authors eventually did begin to react against Romantic ideals. The discussion of literary movements cannot be divorced from social realities,
and the move away from Romanticism and to Realism/Naturalism reflects a changing political and social reality in Brazil. Romanticism was ushered out by a series of events and powerful new ideas that created a dissonance between Brazilian reality and Romantic ideals. As José Veríssimo, writing in 1915, notes, the Paraguayan War (1865-1870), consequences of the end of the slave trade (1851), controversy over the role of the Catholic Church in Brazilian political life, and the impact of the Franco-Prussian War (1870) caused great shifts in Brazilian intellectual thought (História, 282). Additionally, the influence of republican ideals—manifested so clearly in the declaration of republics in both Spain (1868) and France (1870)—caused Brazilians to question their support of the empire (282). The emphasis on critical spirit and on “modern” thought affected attitudes toward government and toward literature.3

Realists and Naturalists defined themselves in terms of their opposition to their immediate predecessors, the Romantics. These new schools were characterized by a desire to explore reality via rigorous logic, scientific understanding, and critical analysis of the world. They represented all that the teary sentimentality and idealized reality of Romanticism was not. The two movements enjoyed many similar characteristics in Brazil. “In the study of the late nineteenth century novel, the distinction between realism and naturalism is often not completely clear . . . Historians of Brazilian literature generally consider realism together with naturalism and focus their discussions of the novel on the latter movement” (Stern 273).

3 Modern is, of course, a relative term, with implicit cultural values. I use it here as it was used and understood by writers/critics at the time, as a new and more progressive line of thought than had been dominant in the past.
Noted historians, such as Nelson Werneck Sodré in História da literatura brasileira; seus fundamentos econômicos and Ronald de Carvalho in Pequena história da literatura brasileira, do not separate Realism from its fraternal twin Naturalism, choosing instead to focus on Naturalism. Realism did, however, have its Brazilian manifestations and its essence can be separated from that of Naturalism.

Realists were concerned with seeking truth, uncovering the essential, universal elements of reality, and practicing exactitude in the portrayal of this reality (Amora 103). “Do ponto de vista da estrutura, a ficção realista se distingue pelo predomínio da personagem sôbre a ação, do retrato de indivíduos e da crônica de suas vidas sôbre incidentes, êstes aliás decorrentes das próprias motivações humanas” (A. Coutinho, Literatura 25). On the aesthetic level, Realist writers recognized the act of writing as implicitly valuable, believing in art for art’s sake (Bosi 186). While Realism never became a dominant style in Brazilian literature, its presence is consequential because it denoted a move away from Romantic ideals and a move toward a more objective representation of Brazilian reality.

Realism was manifested in Brazilian literature and reached its apex with Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis (1839-1908), arguably the most remarkable Brazilian writer in history. His presence in the nineteenth century, as “the most distinguished and respected figure in the Brazilian literary scene,” even in the mid-twentieth century continues to obscure other writers of his era (E. Veríssimo 66). He is generally regarded as the one brilliant literary figure of his time. Because of his emphasis on psychological analysis (which gave great depth to his characters), his ironic sense of humor (which gave his novels their unanticipated plot twists), and his universality (which continues to make
scholars worldwide write about him), Machado de Assis has always been the reference point for evaluating achievement potential in Brazilian literature. While he is generally regarded as a Realist, Machado de Assis’ “technical innovations that allow him to present his critical portrait of urban society also remove him from the mainstream of European realism” and certainly set him apart from the rather ill-defined Realist movement in Brazil (Stern 275).

Most of Machado de Assis’ contemporaries aligned themselves with the Naturalist school, another reason for which he, defined as a Realist, is so notable. While Naturalism expounded many of the same tenets as did Realism, in terms of exploring and analyzing reality, Naturalists were not analysts in the Machadian sense. The depth of psychological analysis characteristic of Machado de Assis was missing in Naturalist novels. Influenced by the many –isms—Darwinism, Evolutionism, Positivism, and Socialism—of the late nineteenth century, Naturalism was a literary continuation of the social and natural sciences. Naturalists accentuate the scientific nature of Realist tenets; it was common to see characters and plots submitted to the “destino cego das ‘leis naturais’ que a ciência da época julgava ter codificado” (Bosi 187). These writers were concerned not so much with the

herói que age, atua e se realiza qual uma peça individualizada e independente (situação evidente no romance romântico), mas como ‘átomo do organismo cósmico’, movido deterministicamente por tôdas as forças que conduzem êsse organismo sujeito às leis da evolução, movido cegamente por tôdas as forças biológicas, atávicas e sociais. (Amora 104)

While Machado de Assis was exploring the complexities of man’s mind, the Naturalists were depicting social phenomena. Aluísio de Azevedo (1858-1913), for example, formulates a mixed-race love story in O mulato (1881) and explores the racial
prejudices that a black-white courtship caused in white society. In their treatment of
social phenomena, these authors explored reality via the mundane details of daily life,
thus earning them the criticism that their novels were pedantic. “Outras deformações . . .
imprimiu o naturalismo aos nossos escritores: o pedantismo científico . . . e a confusão
entre observar e inventariar” (Pereira 132, emphasis added). More simply put, Naturalist
novels, “judged by aesthetic standards . . . are not among the works of the world’s great
literature” (Wagley 256).4

Naturalism was the predominant literary style when Júlia Lopes de Almeida
began to write in the 1880s, and it continued to be influential through last decade of the
century. Changes in Brazilian politics and society, caused by the abolition of slavery
(1888) and the proclamation of the Republic (1889), brought about related changes in
literary concerns. While Naturalism still ran strong, writers began to reach beyond the
limitations of exploring reality and returned to more traditional literary roots, seeking
inspiration in fables, legends, and mythology as had the Romantics (Amora 156). “Era
quase uma renovação romântica, mas dum romantismo refinado e preciso” (Pereira 221).
Almeida and many of her contemporaries, including Henrique Coelho Neto (1864-1934),
the dominant figure and most verbose writer of the time, Artur Azevedo (1855-1908),
Afrânio Peixoto (1876-1947), and Xavier Marques (1861-1942), were influenced by
Naturalism but did not subscribe completely to its tenets. These writers did not adhere to
any specific literary style, but were influenced by a variety of cultural factors marked by
the absolute supremacy of French models and fashions among the elite. Needell, in
writing on belle-époque literati, specifically cites mundanismo, “the fashionable,

4 While the eminent anthropologist Charles Wagley may not be a literary critic, his statement summarizes
the opinions, expressed at greater length and in more detail, offered by Brazilian literary historians.
“Europhile way of life” inscribed by conspicuous consumption and requiring rapid production, “literary consumer fetishism” characterized by the dominance of a variety of combinations of French trends, and the self-absorption of the elite (184, 200). While this was a time of transition in Brazilian society, the writers of the era focused on the cosmopolitan lives of the carioca elite at the expense of reflecting larger social realities.

Coelho Neto’s writing is cited by Needell as a superb expression of belle-époque literature. First, it was nearly all produced quickly for publication in periodicals. Second, in both style and substance, it drew on the Francophile tendencies of the period, combining echoes of Romanticism, the florescence of Naturalism, and the triumph of the fin-de-siècle. In a phrase, it was marred by hasty writing, directed toward facile, unrefined taste, and was clearly derivative in origin. (205)

Almeida’s work has not escaped the type of criticism aimed at her peers. However, one must further analyze her books in order to assess the extent to which she was a product of her era.

Although no women have yet been mentioned, Júlia Lopes de Almeida was not the lone female literary figure of her era. One cannot begin to discuss Almeida without first considering the role of women in letters. Lúcia Pereira, writing in 1950, noted that a careful study of Brazilian literary dictionaries revealed but a dozen names of women writers, and that scholars are often forced to accept the judgement of the authors’ contemporaries because most of their work is no longer in print (259). Publication records, while not complete, indicate that approximately 100 women writers were publishing in Brazil between 1840-1890, but few of them are remembered today (Bernardes 98). Gender studies scholars and feminist presses, like Editôra Mulheres in Florianópolis, are rescuing these women from anonymity in anthologies like Escritoras brasileiras do século XIX, but these women traditionally have been left out of the canon.
Women published regularly during the nineteenth century, especially in newspapers, and their serialized novels, often directed at women readers, were widely read. In the twentieth century, however, they were forgotten.

Júlia Lopes de Almeida suffered this same fate. However, she was one of the few women writers to earn the praise and respect of her contemporary male peers, both in Brazil and abroad. While not alone, she was certainly the most celebrated woman writer of her time.

The Life of Júlia Lopes de Almeida (1862-1934)

Júlia Valentina da Silveira Lopes was born in Rio de Janeiro on September 24, 1862, daughter of Dr. Valentim José da Silveira Lopes, a doctor, and Adelina Pereira Lopes. Dr. Silveira Lopes was an influential man and eventually became the Visconde de São Valentim. He was also a writer, contributing articles to the liberal, republican Gazeta de Campinas. Both the professional position and intellectual pursuits of her father contributed to the intellectual atmosphere in which Júlia was raised. Dona Adelina Pereira Lopes was herself an accomplished woman: a concert musician, with a degree in piano, song, and composition from the Conservatório de Lisboa. The arts were unquestionably influential in Almeida’s upbringing. From her early years, Júlia was inclined toward expressing herself artistically through writing. “Numa época em que era raro encontrarem-se mulheres escritoras, desde cedo [Almeida] sentiu a inclinação pelas letras, num lar cercado de artistas” (Paixão, A Silveirinha 7).

Despite the support that might be inferred from the artistic pursuits of her family, the most oft-told episode from Almeida’s childhood recounts her perceived need to hide her cherished vocation and the incident by which it was discovered by her father.
Almeida’s retelling of this incident, in her interview with the distinguished writer João do Rio for his book *O momento literário*, has found its way into numerous literary histories and dictionaries. This critical interview with João do Rio, one of the primary records accessed for later research, reveals much about her childhood, her marriage, and her attitude towards her calling. Almeida begins:

Pois eu em moça fazia versos. Ah! Não imagina com que encanto. Era como um prazer proibido! Sentia ao mesmo tempo a delícia de os compor e o medo de que acabassem por descobril-os . . . A mim sempre me parecia que sá viesssem a saber desses versos em casa, viria o mundo abaixo. (23)

Despite Almeida’s best efforts to hide, however, her sister entered her room one day in 1881, snatched her verses, ran to their father, announced “Papá, a Júlia faz versos!,” and showed the verses to him (24). To her surprise however, Almeida’s father did not respond. The next day, as the family left the theater, her father reported that the *Gazeta de Campinas* had asked him for an article about the actress Gemma Cuniberti. He insisted that he had no time to do so, but had volunteered his daughter to write the article in his stead. She was thrilled. Only later did Almeida learn that her father had never been asked for the article. It was the beginning of Almeida’s long career, initiated through the unexpected support of her father.

Brito Broca, repeating the story above in *Românticos, pré-românticos, ultra-românticos; vida literária e romantismo brasileiro* (1961), asks the question, “e se uma Júlia Lopes conseguiu, afinal, tornar-se escritora, quantas vocações femininas não se estiolaram ante essa barreira de hostilidade?” (76). While Rio failed to comment on this issue, Broca recognizes the extraordinary situation in which Almeida must have lived in order to become a successful writer.
At nineteen years of age, then, Almeida began her career as a writer. Soon she began to write for *A Semana*, edited in Rio de Janeiro and directed by Valentim Magalhães and Filinto de Almeida, a young Portuguese writer. Júlia’s relationship with Filinto de Almeida grew and they fell in love. She married him in 1887, the year after her first two books of stories, *Contos infantis*, written with her sister, Adelina Lopes Vieira, and *Traços e iluminuras*, were published.

Maternal and spousal roles were of utmost importance to Almeida and often conflicted with her occupation. She was very aware of the tensions created by her situation. In the interview with João do Rio, she moves beyond the stories of her youth to a commentary on her role as an adult woman and the limitations placed upon the practice of her profession. She claims “sou de muito pouca leitura” in one breath, to follow quickly with “era capaz de passar a vida lendo, mas uma dona de casa não pode perder tanto tempo . . . Quem entretanto cuidaria dos filhos, dos arranjos da casa?” (31). João do Rio immediately asked when she found time to write. Her response: “Aos poucos, de vagar, com o tempo” (31). She wrote after lunch, when it was a bit more quiet. Encouraging her children to amuse themselves outside, she locked herself in her study. However, a maid would either have questions or one of the children would fall down and begin crying. “A’s vezes não posso absolutamente sentar-me cinco minutos, e é nestes dias que sinto uma imperiosa, uma irresistivel vontade de escrever . . . ” (31).

Filinto de Almeida’s continued support was of great importance to Almeida’s ability to pursue her career as a writer. His encouragement of her writing is touted in the article by João do Rio, who observes,

*Esse sentimento de mutua admiração é um dos encantos daquelle lar. Filinto esquece os seus versos e pensa nos romances da esposa.* Leva-a a
The Almeidas wrote together, publishing the novel *A casa verde* (1898-1899), under the pseudonym A. Julinto, in the *Jornal do Comércio*.

Despite time limitations and with the support of her husband, Almeida wrote and published for almost fifty years. In 1891, she published *A família Medeiros* as a newspaper serial in the *Gazeta de Notícias*. *A família Medeiros*, although not her first novel, is arguably Almeida’s first important work, and has received accolades from those literary historians who mention Almeida in their studies. Also in this early phase of her publishing life, Almeida wrote *A viúva Simões* (1897), again published as a serial. All of Almeida’s novels, though most were first published as folhetins, were later published as books. In a tight market with few publishers and few booksellers, as noted previously, this accomplishment was certainly noteworthy and speaks to the popularity of her novels during her life.

During this early part of her career, Almeida broke from writing fiction to publish her *Livro das noivas* (1896), a handbook for young brides in which she “made explicit her concept of women’s modern position” (Needell 136). Her advice to young brides emphasized the “necessity of subordination to the husband’s desires” (136). While a proponent of higher education for women, Almeida cautions young women against reading naughty novels and “sees the improvement of women’s education primarily as a benefit for the better instruction of their children” (136). Considering her personal life, and the fact that Almeida herself chose to fulfill her role as wife and mother above the practice of her literary vocation, her advice to young women is understandable.
Almeida was enjoying tremendous literary success after a decade of publishing. Her popular and critical successes were not able to overcome imposed gender limitations in all instances, however, as illustrated by Filinto de Almeida’s induction into the Academia Brasileira de Letras (ABL), established in 1897. The ABL, modeled after the French Academy, did not admit women into its ranks. There is little indication that Filinto, not a particularly noteworthy poet, received the critical acclaim awarded his wife. He is absent from many contemporary dictionaries of Brazilian literature, including several which list his wife. As noted in the introduction, it has been asserted that

a inclusão de Felinto de Almeida, entre os sócios fundadores da ABL, chegou a ser explicada como uma espécie de recompensa pela exclusão de sua mulher, Júlia Lopes de Almeida, considerada a mais categorizada escritora de seu tempo . . . e muito mais maneira para escrever do que o marido, dono de um estilo pesadão que aos próprios acadêmicos assustava. (E. Coutinho 66)

Since Almeida was unable to sit among her male peers, her space was “gentilmente cedido” to her husband (Sharpe, Introduction 11). “Este lugar, de direito e de fato, seria seu, não fosse a Academia tão gênero-excludente” (11). Despite having earned noteworthy critical acclaim, Almeida was not able to claim her rightful seat among the most gifted literary figures of her generation.

This injustice did not limit her literary production, however. With the new century came more fiction, beginning with A falência (1901), followed by a book of short stories, Ânsia eterna (1903), another two serialized novels, A intrusa (1908) and Cruel amor (1911), and a play, A herança (1908). Almeida continued to write non-fiction as well, with her second book of advice to women, Livro das donas e donzelas (1906) and Eles e elas (1907-1909), the noted collection of monologues and dialogues, published as a column in O Pais.
By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, Almeida was entering her late period of literary production. Although she continued to publish until her death in 1934, her most lauded work was published before 1920. During these later years, Almeida wrote *Correio da roça* (1913) and *A Silveirinha* (1914), both published as serialized novels. Almeida wrote a few short stories and two more novels during the last twenty years of her life, but focused more of her attention on essays and other non-fiction. By the last two decades of her life, Almeida had “created enough of a following to make her one of the few literati, along with [Olavo] Bilac, Coelho Neto, and João do Rio, celebrated enough to give fashionable public lectures” (Needell 214).

Júlia Lopes de Almeida died on May 30, 1934. She left behind a vast literary production: over 40 volumes of novels, short stories, children’s literature, plays, essays and newspaper columns. Celebrated by her peers and widely read during her lifetime, Almeida was the most prominent woman writer of her time.

**Critical Reception of the Work of Júlia Lopes de Almeida: A Chronology**

Almeida’s career, which began in 1886 with the publication of two books of short stories, was a successful one. By the end of the 1890s, after only a decade of publishing and three novels behind her, she was a respected and recognized writer. She continued to be praised, both in Brazil and abroad, throughout her lifetime. After her death, however, her work fell into obscurity for several decades. As literary fashions shifted and scholars’ attitudes towards Almeida’s period changed, most critics and literary historians mentioned her only perfunctorily, with few notable exceptions who offered brief critical remarks on her work. For over four decades, Almeida’s books themselves were virtually inaccessible to Brazilian readers. With the late 1980s, and the republication and rescue of
her forgotten works, a new stage of reception occurs. As her work was reborn, so was critical interest in her. Feminist scholars, in particular, began to write about Almeida and to evaluate her work according to contemporary feminist philosophies. We now turn to the uneven critical reception of Almeida’s work.

By the end of the nineteenth century, after only three published novels, Almeida was enjoying critical acclaim. José Veríssimo, writing soon after the release of A falência, notes that “a Sra. D. Júlia Lopes de Almeida toma decididamente lugar, e não somenos, entre os nossos romancistas” (Estudos, 5a série 79). Almeida’s fame also crossed the Atlantic and she was admired by her contemporaries in Europe. In 1899, Portuguese writer Guiomar Torrezão declared Almeida to be the best woman writer in Brazil (Sharpe, Introduction 9). In 1910, Victor Orban, a French scholar, included one of Almeida’s short stories, “Les Roses,” in his Littérature Brésilienne, an anthology praised in its preface by noted scholar Oliveira Lima (1867-1928) and focused heavily on the work of contemporary authors. Orban, noting that Almeida is a very distinguished woman of letters, adds that her name is “très respecté dans la presse quotidienne et périodique; au cours de ces dernières années, sa collaboration au Paiz nous a valu des chroniques fort admirées, parfois profondes, presque toujours fines et spirituelles” (327). Over the next few years, she was celebrated on the old continent with an honorary party thrown by the intellectual elite in Lisbon and a banquet organized by her French literary colleagues, the Société de Gens de Lettres, in Paris (Sousa XII; Xavier, Introduction III). Almeida had become an internationally-acclaimed author.

Back in Brazil, writing in 1912, Oliveira Lima begins, “Tem-se dito várias vezes ser D. Júlia Lopes de Almeida o melhor romancista contemporâneo do Brasil” (166).
This particular observation is noteworthy, as was João do Rio’s reference to Almeida as “o primeiro romancista brasileiro,” for its absence of gender specification: Lima notes the profound respect for Almeida as a novelist (o melhor romancista), not simply as a female novelist (a melhor romancista). While he does not explicitly say he agrees with this assessment, he proceeds to praise her mastery as a writer, commenting that her latest novels “são verdadeiramente obras muito completas e muito atraentes” (174).

In Rio de Janeiro, on her forty-third birthday in 1915, Almeida’s Brazilian peers organized an impressive literary party in her honor, “em que tomaram parte, proclamando os méritos e as glórias da excelsa escriptora, os nossos mais representativos intellectuaes” (Sousa XII). Almeida, by this point, had been celebrated both at home and abroad by other artists, writers, and intellectuals. Her place in Brazilian letters appeared to be fixed. While her literary production slowed in the last fifteen years of her life, Almeida continued to be celebrated, through invitations to give public lectures. Her fame was international and her merit remained unquestioned.

Considering her acclaim, it may seem surprising that Almeida does not appear in Ronald de Carvalho’s Pequena historia da literatura brasileira (1919), one of the early respected literary histories. Carvalho, however, divides his analysis according to very distinct literary trends, with Romanticism (1830-1870) followed by Naturalism (1870-1900), and a brief chapter describing the last trends of the nineteenth century. Neither Almeida, nor her contemporaries who do not fall clearly into the above-mentioned categories, including a major literary figure of the time, Coelho Neto, appear in the small volume. Almeida does not suffer individual exclusion, insomuch as her era is reduced to
its major trends. The dismissal of these post-Naturalist writers, who do not ascribe to any one school, will be echoed in later literary histories.

In 1938, four years after Almeida’s death, her short story “O sino de ouro” and other short pieces from her books appeared in an anthology by Maximiano Gonçalves.\(^5\) Almeida, the only woman in the section on “Prosadores Brasileiros,” is set alongside Monteiro Lobato (1882-1948), Graça Aranha (1868-1931), Euclides da Cunha (1866-1909), Coelho Neto, Raul Pompéia (1863-1895), Joaquim Nabuco (1849-1910), Rui Barbosa (1849-1923), Machado de Assis, and Alencar. In his biographical section on Almeida, Gonçalves comments: “conquistou, nas lêtras brasileiras, e na língua portuguêsa, um lugar bem à parte, bem legítima e inconfundivelmente seu” (79). Gonçalves also quotes João Luso, who, upon Almeida’s death, commented on her literary merit: “Não há, não pode haver mais belo empreendimento na vida dum escritor” (79).

The acclaim awarded her work continued beyond her death, as long as the traditional critics did not ascribe to the emerging Modernism. The Modernist movement involved a large-scale renovation of artistic styles and content through an emphasis on innovative technique and a critical reassessment of national realities. While previous changes in literary trends (e.g., Romanticism to Naturalism) reflected shifting modes in European thought, Brazilian Modernists wanted to break away from Old World dominance of artistic expression. As Modernism began to change the literary landscape of Brazil, most belle-époque writers, heavily influenced by European schools, began to be dismissed by scholars. Machado de Assis, Lima Barreto, and Euclides da Cunha were

\(^5\) While the 5th edition (1967) of *Seleta literária* was used for this thesis, Gonçalves’ did not update later editions to include new authors. His literary selections remained the same throughout the years.
the few notable exceptions. For Almeida, the impact of Modernism resulted in years of virtual anonymity.

Nelson Werneck Sodré’s História da literatura brasileira; seus fundamentos econômicos reflects the beginning of the changing tides in critical thought. In the first edition of Sodré’s book (1938), a highly respected history largely concerned with socio-economic factors as was the tendency in the 1930s, Almeida does not appear at all. By the third, greatly expanded edition (1960), Almeida’s inclusion in Sodré’s study is brief and occurs mostly in footnotes. Sodré comments that she was a contributor, among a list of others, to O País’ literary column. His fleeting observations about her actual work note the “gratuidade” of the literature written primarily for the “público feminino” (449, 468). Thus Sodré illustrates the dismissal of Almeida’s work, both on a stylistic level and in terms of its overall quality. While women, by the end of the nineteenth century, were known to be active readers, causing the augmentation of the “número de obras em prosa, de consumo mais fácil,” women, educated to be wives and mothers, were not considered to be discerning readers: “a cultura da mulher deixa a desejar porque ela não lê a grande literatura e, por sua vez, o que consomem estas senhoras não pode ser grande literatura por constituir matéria de leitura de tão despreparados olhos” (Lajolo and Zilberman 237, 244). Therefore, work written primarily for female audiences was considered inferior to the classic works of the time. Machado de Assis stands out, as the “voz dissonante” during this era, in his defense of women’s abilities and reading tastes (245). Sodré’s remarks, however, reflect long-standing attitudes towards literature aimed at women and foreshadow future reception of Almeida: the work itself will be discounted
for several decades to be replaced by a renewed interest because of her gender and her focus on feminine issues.

**1940-1987**

Starting around 1940, as most critics embraced Modernist tenets, Almeida’s inclusion and evaluation in works of Brazilian literary history is limited, at best. It certainly does not compare favorably to the critical reaction she received during her lifetime. While consistently celebrated during her life, Almeida almost disappeared from public view in the fifty years following her death. She is conspicuously absent from most anthologies of Brazilian literature produced between 1940-1985. Notably, she does not appear in Afrânio Coutinho’s three-volume *Antologia brasileira de literatura* (1965), that includes her peers Coelho Neto and Aluísio Azevedo. She is not included in the 105-volume collection entitled *Nossos clássicos* (1955-1970), a compilation of selections drawn from principal Portuguese and Brazilian authors throughout history. While some authors have three or more volumes, Almeida’s work is excluded altogether. In over 2,000 books and magazines, housed in the Benson Latin American Collection, on Brazilian literature published between 1900-1990, Almeida’s name only appears a handful of times. Those few instances merit discussion, in terms of their commentary and critical position on Almeida’s body of work.

The noted literary historian Afrânio Peixoto compiled his history and anthology *Panorama da literatura brasileira* in 1940, only six years after Almeida’s death. Peixoto merely lists Almeida’s biographical data and her bibliography. The only personal

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6 A search through the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas at Austin, which houses one of the most comprehensive collections of Brazilian literature and literary criticism in the world, reveals the full extent of Almeida’s exclusion from Brazilian literary history between 1940-1987.
information included is: “Esposa de Filinto de Almeida” (515). Peixoto’s treatment of Almeida, in such brevity and without details, is dismissive of someone who achieved considerable fame and critical acclaim during her lifetime. He cites her because she formed part of the literary landscape of Brazil, but his perfunctory mention exemplifies a shift in attitudes towards Almeida’s work and her period. As Zahidé Muzart notes in the introduction to Escritoras brasileiras do século XIX, “As razões do esquecimento da obra das escritoras . . . passam pela violenta mudança nos padrões do gosto na época do Modernismo” (19). As critics embraced the tenets of Modernism, their positions regarding earlier periods changed dramatically and Almeida began to be forgotten.

Critical perspectives were changing but, during the transitional period, Almeida’s work continued to receive some praise. In 1941, Eugenio Werneck compiled the twenty-first edition of his Antologia brasileira (1900), with a brief critical introduction in which Almeida was firmly placed with the leading writers of her time. “D. Júlia Lopes de Almeida, sem contestação a mais notável escritora brasileira de todos os tempos, é autora de romances e contos que lhe assinalam lugar e posição de destaque na história da literatura brasileira” (94). Werneck also comments that her writing was compared favorably, during her lifetime, to that of French author Guy de Maupassant, an especially remarkable commendation since French letters had historically been the models for Brazilian literature. Almeida’s appearance in Werneck’s collection was her last in a Brazilian anthology for several decades.

Almeida is mentioned only briefly, or excluded altogether, in literary histories published throughout the next two decades. In 1945, Almeida is listed among the writers of her era in Mário Martins’ A evolução da literatura brasileira. Although merely a short
bibliography, one comment reads, “novelista e oradora de real mérito” (146). Only two
of her novels, A família Medeiros and Memórias de Marta, are listed in her bibliography.
Omitted from this list are the novels which won her so much praise during her lifetime,
including A falência, A viúva Simões, A intrusa, and Correio da roça. In Manuel
Bandeira’s 1958 Brief History of Brazilian Literature, he merely lists Almeida with other
Realist writers. Nothing more is said of her presence in Brazilian literature. She is
missing altogether from the respected A literatura no Brasil (1955), organized by Afrânio
Coutinho. This lack of attention toward, or ignorance of, her work is mirrored in
numerous other histories of the period.

Lúcia Pereira is the first, and one of only two, scholar to pay more than indifferent
attention to Almeida’s work during this time (1940-1987). In the 1957 Prosa de ficção
(de 1870 a 1920), one of the most complete studies of the prose of the latter part of the
nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, Pereira offers an analysis of Almeida
as an author. The importance of Pereira’s study is evidenced by the number of references
made to it in subsequent literary histories. Her treatment of Almeida’s work is far longer
and far more critical than in previous histories. Pereira includes Almeida in her chapter
entitled, “Sorriso da Sociedade,” a designation she uses for writers who focus on the
“superfície da vida” (245). These writers, explains Pereira, do not debate the great
questions of life and human destiny. They see literature, “não como a arte perturbadora e
inquiridora por excelência, mas como a manifestação do bem-estar social, como um
ofício quase recreativo” (246). Pereira harshly criticizes these writers, who include
Coelho Neto, Artur Azevedo, Afrânio Peixoto, Xavier Marques, and João do Rio, in
addition to Almeida, for what she perceives to be their “diletantismo” (246). She
describes them as writers who are more likely to play with ideas than to be possessed by them, who write for distraction rather than for comprehension, and whose works are severely limited by their approach to literature (246).

After listing her objections to the writers grouped in this chapter, Pereira proceeds to detail the issues that plague them individually. She notes that Almeida is among approximately a dozen female writers listed in Brazilian literary dictionaries, and that she was the most prominent figure among female writers of her era. She notes that José Veríssimo preferred her to Coelho Neto. In a footnote, she admits that Almeida had always been respected in literary circles. But Pereira does not agree that Almeida merits the praise given her during her lifetime. Pereira criticizes Almeida for her monotony as a writer, accuses her of not having her own style, and deems her unoriginal (260). Pereira admits, however, that Almeida reveals “inegáveis dons literários. A simplicidade, tão rara sempre, e ainda mais no tempo em que escreveu, é a sua qualidade dominante” (261). As Pereira comments, Almeida’s simplicity, compared to the pedantry of Naturalist description and the verbosity of contemporaries like Coelho Neto, is especially admirable. Finally, Pereira praises her for the naturalness of the dialogue and the truth of environment in her best works, A família Medeiros, A falência, and Ânsia eterna (261). Pereira allows that Almeida is a gifted writer, but considers her to be a writer who does not take chances.

After such a negative introduction to the theme of the “Sorriso da sociedade” chapter, Pereira’s evaluation of Almeida’s work is more well-balanced than one might assume. While not a resounding endorsement, the discussion of Almeida acknowledges her talent as a writer. Where Pereira strays, however, is in her placement of Almeida into
a chapter that assumes superficial observation and lack of psychological depth.

Almeida’s books, while often portraying elite families, dwell on family upheavals and the often difficult, changing roles of women in society. Pereira, while accusing these authors of superficiality, offers only a superficial evaluation of Almeida’s work. And Pereira’s assessment of Almeida is the primary source to which future scholars refer. Her criticism of Almeida is included, either cited directly or paraphrased, in nearly all of the subsequent literary compendiums in which Almeida appears.

Pereira’s influence is obvious in the Italian Storia della letteratura brasiliana (1959) by Pasquale Aniel Jannini, although this chronicler describes Almeida in a more favorable light. In his section “Fuori del Regionalismo,” he cites Almeida as a writer inclined toward careful observation, lack of artifice, and rare simplicity and sensibility (153). Jannini praises the same works (A família Medeiros, A falência, and Ânsia eterna) as did Pereira, whose Prosa de ficção was his primary source, but he fails to repeat Pereira’s criticism of Almeida as a writer. He includes only positive commentary on her work. This entry, while brief, is far more positive than several Brazilian literary histories discussed here.

In the Pequeno dicionário de literatura brasileira (1967), following Filinto de Almeida’s entry, in which Júlia is not mentioned, Almeida’s entry begins with “Espôsa do escritor Filinto de Almeida,” and notes that she left an “obra extensa e desigual” (Paes and Moisés 23). “Escrita em linguagem simples, cujo purismo gramatical não alcança redimi-la da falta de vigor e originalidade, destinava-se à leitura em família” (23). Almeida’s great fault is that her novels focus on the superficialities of life, a phrase familiar from Pereira’s Prosa de ficção, one of only two sources used for this dictionary
entry. This trend continues in Raimundo de Menezes’ *Dicionário literário brasileiro* (1969). While Almeida’s entry is significantly longer than in previous dictionaries, the majority of the text relates the famous incident, in which Almeida’s vocation is discovered by her family, from the João do Rio interview. In the brief criticism section, Pereira’s analysis, one of only two sources, merits two separate citations. The *Dicionário crítico do moderno romance brasileiro* (1970), edited by Pedro Américo Maia, is the last Brazilian dictionary, chronologically, to include Almeida among its entries. Almeida’s entry includes bibliographical information, and a short critical paragraph which praises *A família Medeiros, A falência* and *Ânsia eterna* as her strongest novels. Not surprisingly, Pereira’s *Prosa de ficção* is the only source listed. As with other dictionaries, commentary on Almeida’s work, brief in nature, relies heavily on the previous scholarship of only one scholar. All of these dictionaries, as a result of their principal source, offer the same dismissal of Almeida’s books: while she has an aptitude for painting her surroundings, her novels do not rise to a level which would deem them worthy of classic status.

In Portugal, Almeida’s work merits commentary in the *Dicionário das literaturas portuguêsa, brasileira e galega* (1960). Unlike the Brazilian dictionaries, this listing does not seem to rely on Pereira’s evaluation and attempts to explain Almeida’s exclusion from Brazilian literary histories, stating that her books had been “injustamente omitida pelos historiadores e críticos da Literatura Brasileira, o que se explica, aliás, por lhe faltarem características nitidamente próprias” (Coelho 32-33). The clarification continues:

a esse período, que um crítico classificou de ‘incolor’ e outro crítico ‘de depressão’ (durante o qual não deixou de fulgurar e ‘estrela solitária’ de
Machado de Assis) pertenceu, como figura de primeira grandeza, Coelho Neto — o que basta para o definir como fase em que o gosto pela expressão literária em si fatalmente prejudicaria a obra novelesca. (33)

The implication here is that critical reception of Almeida has been hampered by the attitude of critics towards the time in which she wrote. This literary encyclopedia, then, points to one of the problems of Almeida’s critical reception: her presence during a period considered less than noteworthy, a period during which writers continued to be obscured by the shining presence of Machado de Assis.

Brazilian literary histories, even when not directly influenced by Pereira’s Prosa de ficção, continue the trend of abbreviated inclusion of Almeida. Or like Alfredo Bosi, in História concisa da literature brasileira (1970), they exclude her altogether although they do comment on the work of her contemporaries. Sílvio de Almeida, commenting on the state of “Letras em São Paulo” in Estudos (1967), admires the distinguished Almeida, who spent part of her formative years there: “mas a autora da Família Medeiros não pertence mais ao nosso ambiente, embora se haja formado aqui, como aliás outros vultos primazes da literatura nacional” (125). While the unqualified praise may seem a welcome change from the critical trend into which Almeida has fallen, Sílvio de Almeida, like his predecessors, chooses not to scrutinize the texts, but rather limits himself to brief statements about the value of Almeida’s work.

In 1978, Wilson Martins released his seven-volume, landmark work História da inteligência brasileira, in which Almeida’s name appears no less than 27 times. In most places, she is contained in lists of books published in a given year. However, on several occasions, Martins comments on the content and quality of her work. Therefore, Martins, along with Lúcia Pereira, is one of only two scholars to offer more than an indifferent
reference to Almeida. He criticizes A família Medeiros for containing artificial dialogue and for being repetitive (401). He praises A viúva Simões, A falência, and A intrusa and compares them favorably to the work of the eminent Portuguese writer Eça de Queirós (1845-1900). On several occasions, Martins notes the critical praise and general popularity Almeida received during her lifetime. He repeats the story of Filinto de Almeida’s election to the Academia Brasileira de Letras, reiterating the accepted truth that Filinto “ocupou vicariamente uma cadeira da Academia em lugar da esposa” (5: 495). While Martins does not have space or the obligation to examine Almeida’s work in great detail, his inclusion of her as a respected writer over four decades is noteworthy.

Independent from the perfunctory nature of her inclusion in other literary histories, some scholars reduce Almeida’s contribution to Brazilian letters to her relationship with other recognized authors. Massaud Moisés’ two-volume História da literatura brasileira (1984) does not address the quality of her writing. Almeida is included only as a reference point for Artur Azevedo’s O dote, for which her short story “ Reflexões de um marido” served as inspiration. In this way, Almeida’s presence in Brazilian letters is discounted to the extent that her work has no value of its own. A writer who actively published for over forty years, Almeida has been reduced to a writer who produced one short story that inspired a great writer. Temístocles Linhares continues in this line of thought in his História crítica do romance brasileiro (1987). Almeida’s name is included only in a footnote about Afonso Celso (1860-1938), who co-wrote a “novel-in-the-round” along with Almeida and a host of other writers. At this most basic level, Almeida’s writing, on its own, holds no intrinsic value. Serious analysis
of this work is not even in question; she appears merely as a footnote in the history of Brazilian literature.

The lack of attention, or desatenção, toward Almeida in scholarship of this period (1940-1987) is demonstrated in the treatment given her in Enciclopédia de literatura brasileira (1990). The extensive bibliography on Almeida is largely comprised of criticism written during her lifetime; sixteen of the twenty-seven references were published between 1893-1934. The encyclopedia repeats Lúcia Pereira’s assessment of Almeida’s work which, along with Wilson Martins’ commentary, comprises the only thoughtful analysis of Almeida’s corpus in the fifty years following her death. No literary historian has discussed Almeida’s work at length. Whether praising or criticizing her, scholars have limited her inclusion to a few sentences, a paragraph or, at best, a couple of pages within the long history of Brazilian literature.

The Turning Point: New Interest in Almeida, 1987 Forward

In 1987, Almeida’s work itself began to be rediscovered. With the exception of the 1963 republication of Cruel amor (1911), targeted to women readers as a romance novel, Almeida’s work had only been accessible to literary scholars who worked with archival sources. The republication of Correio da roça, coupled with a generalized desire on the part of scholars and publishers to rediscover the lost voices of Brazilian literature, initiated the resurgence of academic interest in Almeida’s work. With Editôra Presença’s “Coleção de Resgate,” a book of Almeida’s was again accessible to the general public. Correio da roça was published as the eighth novel in the “Rescue Collection,” and was considered, by the publisher, to be a triple rescue in that it rescued the work itself, one of the few examples of epistolary novels in Brazilian literature, and an example of feminine
narrative from the beginning of the twentieth century (series page). A few years later, in 1994, Biblioteca Nacional reprinted *A intrusa*. Subsequently, a women’s publisher, Editôra Mulheres, republished *A Silveirinha* in 1997, *A viúva Simões* in 1999, and *A falência*, to be released in 2002. While Presença may have begun the resgate in 1987, Editôra Mulheres is, in 2002, the primary publisher responsible for bringing Almeida’s works to the Brazilian public. Each republished novel has been accompanied by a new critical introduction, offering contemporary scholars’ interpretations of Almeida’s work.

Coincidentally, in the same year as *Correio*’s republication, Jeffrey D. Needell’s *A Tropical Belle Époque: Elite Culture and Society in Turn-of-the-Century Rio de Janeiro* (1987) firmly placed Almeida among the carioca literary elite. Almeida is the sole female writer singled out for analysis in Needell’s consideration of belle-époque literature. Translated into Portuguese in 1993 and now a widely read cultural history in Brazil, Needell’s book does not offer a literary analysis of Almeida, but rather highlights her as a writer of special merit during her era. Almeida’s inclusion in his study is notable because Needell, an American scholar, precedes and influences the changing tide of critical thought in Brazil.

Contemporary evaluations of Almeida’s work have reflected neither the unquestioning praise of her contemporaries nor the dismissal of earlier (1940-1987) scholars. Critical standards and dominant concerns, which changed after her death, have again changed and have brought new interpretations of Almeida’s work to light. Almeida appears, at greater length than in previous books, in a newer literary dictionary, Irwin Stern’s *Dictionary of Brazilian Literature* (1988). While the work is not Brazilian, but American, the reading of Almeida is echoed in recent Brazilian dictionaries and literary
histories. Maria Luísa Nunes, the author of Almeida’s listing and a specialist on Machado de Assis, addresses the weak points of her writing: “Simplicity and superficiality, mixed with a good dose of romanticism, are dominant notes in her writing. Her detractors labeled her literature monotonous and her style lacking in any personal trait or characteristic” (10). These comments, of course, stem directly from Pereira’s influential assessment of Almeida in Prosa de ficção. However, Nunes begins to reflect the changing critical attitude in her comments regarding gender issues. She notes both that A falência “offers a woman writer’s perspective on Brazilian women of her time” and that A família Medeiros “features a strong female character” (10). Nunes, while not claiming that Almeida’s work is exemplary, pinpoints the issue that will concern critics from this point forward: the importance of her presence as a woman writer at a time when few existed and the subsequent perspective she can offer on women’s lives during her era.

Also focusing on gender, Maria Bernardes’ Mulheres de ontem? Rio de Janeiro – século XIX (1989) criticizes Almeida for her extreme conservatism. Bernardes cites an article Almeida wrote in a women’s journal in 1889 and not, notably, her novels. The quotation from the article describes Almeida’s attitude towards motherhood, which includes renunciation of daily pleasures and incessant, laborious care for another person. Almeida finishes by praising the child, who “a faz abençoor a ignota providência de a ter feito mulher para ser mãe! (170). Bernardes does not criticize Almeida herself for her views, but rather focuses on the journals that pair progressive statements of purpose with conservative views espoused by women like Almeida, thus sending contradictory messages to women. Noteworthy, however, is Almeida’s extreme conservatism in
accepting the idea that extreme sacrifice is acceptable because woman is born to be a mother.

While feminist scholars were rediscovering Almeida’s work, they did not do so without a critical eye: over the next twelve years, the appreciation of her literary contribution will be coupled with a critical standpoint concerning her gender politics. Scholars who take this stance, however, run the risk of judging Almeida by simplistic and twentieth-century standards. They are in danger of portraying Almeida only as a conventional, un-enlightened woman and not as a complex woman who may have embodied many of the principles of her era but who also consistently depicted strong, financially independent, educated women.

Women’s studies scholars who began to rediscover Almeida include her not only with great Brazilian women writers throughout history, but offer her as a reference point for contemporary Brazilian women’s writing. Elódia Xavier, a scholar still working on Almeida at the time of this writing, organized Tudo no feminino; a mulher e a narrativa brasileira contemporânea in 1991. Though this book focuses on contemporary narrative, Xavier finds reason to include Almeida, the only non-contemporary Brazilian writer included, in her introduction. Xavier presents Almeida as the only background link between old values and contemporary women’s narrative. She notes that Almeida was well-received during her era, but quickly points out that she reflects the dominant values of her time (15). Her lack of questioning makes her appear conservative by today’s standards, but Xavier leaves her reader with the observation that “aqui e ali, sente-se a presença de uma rachadura neste bloco ideológico tão artificial. Prenúncios de conscientização?” (15). It is these hints of consciousness that link Almeida to the
contemporary writers included in Xavier’s work and that intrigue Xavier. Continuing her interest in Almeida, this critic wrote the introduction to the 1994 reprinting of A intrusa, included a chapter on Almeida in Declínio do patriarcado, a família no imaginário feminino (1998), and has completed a new introduction for the republication of A falência.

A formação da leitura no Brasil (1996), a significant study which analyzes the historical processes that accompanied the formation of a reading society, includes important references to Almeida’s work. The authors here reflect on the contradictory role that Almeida embodied during her era. Using Livro das noivas as the basis of their criticism, Lajolo and Zilberman criticize Almeida for encouraging women to read but suggesting they read only useful, moral texts (263). While their observations may ring true for Livro das noivas and the possible effects it had on women’s behavior, Lajolo and Zilberman neglect to research further Almeida’s fiction. Their criticism, based on one didactic work written in 1896, applies to a book and not, on a broader level, to the author. By analyzing women’s changing roles in Almeida’s later books, Lajolo and Zilberman may have offered a more balanced perspective of her gender politics. These scholars, however, fall into the same problematic situation as do others in evaluating Almeida; they choose to simplify her perspective, focusing on her more conventional views and not including the more progressive portraits of women in her novels.

New Interest: Refocusing on the Novels

The foregoing discussion of the inclusion of Júlia Lopes de Almeida, or lack thereof, in literary histories provides an interesting point of departure. However, a
serious study of Almeida’s actual work is necessary in order to determine the validity of both the praise and the criticism she has received since her first works were published. Her books, linked by the general theme of family turmoil, present the complexities of family lives, and of women’s roles within their households, at the end of the nineteenth century. The novels *A família Medeiros*, *A viúva Simões*, *A falência*, *A intrusa*, *Correio da roça* and *A Silveirinha*, all of which were praised during her lifetime and/or republished after her death, and *Eles e elas*, a collection of monologues and dialogues published as a newspaper column, are all tied together by the theme of family upheaval.

These seven books, then, will form the foundation for our interpretation of Almeida’s work and critical reception. Almeida wrote timely, realistic accounts of family life in Brazil during a particularly unsteady time in Brazilian history, when Brazil grappled with such issues as abolition, the emergence of the First Republic and the process of modernization. Each of the selected books reflects those tumultuous events through the ensuing disturbances in private family life. While critics, historically, have refrained from close reading of her œuvre and have primarily made perfunctory mentions of her presence, contemporary scholars have recognized the importance of appreciating her work for the historical perspective it offers us. This analysis of family questions in Almeida’s novels will build on that renewed recognition of Almeida’s merit as a writer.
CHAPTER 2
THE EARLY NOVELS: TURBULENT TIMES, UNSTABLE FAMILIES

Júlia Lopes de Almeida’s first novels are set within the last fifteen years of the nineteenth century, a time of turbulent transition in Brazil. Abolition of slavery (1888), the declaration of the Republic (1889), increased economic diversification, modernization in transportation and communications, urbanization, European immigration—all of these forces made an impact on Brazilian society at the end of the century. Almeida’s early novels, set primarily in the intimate spaces of the carioca elite, focus on the social realities of this changing milieu as they touched individual homes and families. The main characters of these novels are victims, to some extent, of the difficult transitional period in which they live. They suffer for their strict adherence to tradition when mores are changing, for their transgressions of rigid societal rules when nonconformity is not an option, and for their stubborn pride when they are unable to adjust to unstable realities. Instead of focusing on public repercussions for the attitudes or behavior of her characters, however, Almeida reflects on their intimate worlds, on their troubled relationships with family members, feelings of inadequacy, and inner guilt. In unsettled times, Almeida depicts the adaptive processes that people undertake, or refuse to assume, as they make adjustments to their changing worlds.

A família Medeiros (1891), set just before the declaration of abolition, portrays the generational conflict produced by the process of ending slavery in Brazil. This process, beginning with the legal declaration of the end of the slave trade (1850) and
culminating in the actual declaration of abolition, is depicted by Almeida as a humanitarian cause and her tone in the novel is decidedly moralistic. *A família Medeiros* personalizes the issue of abolition by chronicling the effects of slave uprisings, contentious political debate, and the declaration of abolition on one paulista plantation family. The central conflict in the novel focuses on Medeiros, the slave-owning father, his relationship to his abolitionist son, Mario, and the influence of Eva, the progressive, educated, independent cousin who threatens Medeiros’ authority. While slavery and abolition provide points of departure for much of the tension in the family, Medeiros’ fear of change, as the traditional patriarch mired in old structures and suspicious of those who are striving to enter the “modern” world, creates the friction that most endangers the happiness of his family.

While *A família Medeiros* depicts the effects of changing values on familial relationships, *A viúva Simões* (1897), set at the beginning of the new Republic in 1891, portrays the effects of societal expectations on a woman whose own changing values threaten her position in society. The story of Ernestina, a young widow whose reignited, irrepressible passion for her first love brings about her downfall, concentrates on the limitations faced by one woman in a society clinging to old social norms in times of political transition.

In a society with strict social codes, Ernestina, zealously pursuing her own happiness without concern for the rules, becomes a threat to the established social order.

*Nesse quadro [d’*A viúva Simões*], Almeida retrata as contradições enfrentadas pelas mulheres educadas sob os códigos da sensibilidade romântica que representavam uma ameaça ao sucesso da nova sociedade civil, devido ao seu despreparo para a seriedade da missão de esposas e mães dos futuros cidadãos dessa nova arena pública. (Sharpe, Introduction 20)*
In this time of political change, as the new Republic was seeking to establish itself, the family, and the woman’s role within the family, became a central concern in establishing a solid foundation for the new political order of Brazil. Ernestina, renouncing her roles as proper widow and mother in blind pursuit of love, becomes a threat to that order.

Almeida portrays a family caught in the economic commotion of these unsettling times in *A falência* (1901), the account of the irresponsible business dealings which bring about the bankruptcy of a coffee baron. The unwise investments he makes illustrate the period known as Encilhamento, a term that refers to the saddling-up of a horse at a racetrack. During this time, state-supported easy credit and liberalized regulations encouraged investors to saddle-up for the expansion, due to increased industrialization, of the economy. Businessmen hastily entered the race: “the results were a boom of stock market activity, the foundation of numerous new companies and banks, and pervasive speculation and corruption” (Needell 12). With wild speculation followed by a terrible crash, this was a period of boom-and-bust in the Brazilian economy during which many savvy investors quickly became rich while many well-established members of the elite lost their money (Needell 12).

*A falência* opens in 1891, near the end of the expansionist period of the Encilhamento, which provides the backdrop for the narrative but is never addressed explicitly. Francisco Theodoro, a self-made Portuguese immigrant intensely focused on his business, engages in risky, but potentially prosperous, business investments and loses everything. In *A falência*, the consequences of an expanding and volatile economy are portrayed at the most personal level, and the Encilhamento provides the departure to explore the pressures faced by a traditional man in a rapidly changing world.
These three novels, the backbone of Almeida’s early period, develop the theme of family turmoil in a transitional society. While the outside stimuli that trigger the plot development differ in each case, Almeida presents three stories of characters who are unable or unwilling to adapt to the society in which they live. Whether swearing by or defying society’s rules, Medeiros, Ernestina, and Theodoro and their families experience the private repercussions of their willfulness.

**A família Medeiros: Social Progress and Familial Unrest**

*A família Medeiros,* while ostensibly about the process of ending slavery in Brazil, really reflects the clash of conservative and progressive ideals. The traditional power structure embodied by Medeiros comes into conflict with the changing ideals of his family, especially his son Octavio and niece Eva. Although Medeiros’ greatest fear is the change that abolition would bring, he regularly battles not with the abolitionist movement, but with Eva. She alone represents no threat to Medeiros, but it is she, and her defender Octavio, whom he battles as he struggles against the changing values of modernizing society. It is Medeiros’ inability to accept change, or any reminder of imminent change, that causes turmoil in the Medeiros family.

As the novel opens, Octavio has just returned from Europe, his head filled with progressive European ideas. Before he travels to the family plantation, he stops to visit his old teacher, Doutor Morton, and remarks that he has been following the abolitionist movement in Brazil with great interest. His teacher warns him: “Cuidado! Não vá expender ideias de progresso e humanidade no seio da sua fazenda. A abolição, mais dia menos dia, faz-se; a amizade na família é que uma vez quebrada nunca mais torna a ser..."
verdadeiramente sólida” (7). From the beginning, the central conflict of Octavio’s future, that of a family divided, is suggested by his old teacher.

Despite Dr. Morton’s warning, Octavio arrives at the plantation and immediately begins to discuss the abolitionist movement with his father, who, as the good doutor had warned Octavio, opposed it. The senior Medeiros positions himself “contra os reformadores, contra as modernas teorias, contra tudo e todos,” while Octavio defends the “grande obra de humanidade e patriotismo” (17). From the outset, the father and son seem destined to collide not only on abolition but on other progressive social issues as well. As the two argue, Eva enters, bringing a new dimension to the family upheaval soon to begin.

Although Octavio, with his observations as a newly returned Brazilian son, is the primary focus at the beginning of A família Medeiros, he is not the divisive member of the family. Medeiros perceives Eva, an independent and socially progressive woman, to be the greatest threat to his family and his position. When she enters during his argument with Octavio, she immediately begs pardon for a slave whom Medeiros has shackled in the yard. Octavio, who had never met his cousin because of his father’s long estrangement from his uncle, is instantly curious about her. He begins to inquire about her. He learns that: (1) she speaks French, an indication of her education; (2) she has declared she will never marry without love, as Octavio’s sister Nicota, the obedient daughter, will soon do; (3) she inherited her father’s prosperous farm, though she dutifully complied with her father’s dying wish that she go live with her estranged uncle; and, finally, (4) she employs free workers on her farm, following the enlightened

1Orthography adheres to the 1919 edition of A família Medeiros.
example of her father. As an educated, progressive, independent, and wealthy woman, Eva attracts Octavio’s interest, and he falls in love with her.

Octavio assists Eva in her struggles to convince Medeiros to change, but it is she alone who Medeiros understands to be the greatest threat to the landed patriarchal authority that he struggles to defend. Eva embodies all of the changes that Medeiros most fears. The central conflict of the novel, while set against the slave uprisings and social unrest happening around and being discussed by the Medeiros family, remains the clash between progressive and conservative values. Medeiros, the lone conservative of the family, eventually comes into conflict with all members of his family, as he seeks to maintain control, both as a plantation-owner and as a patriarch, during a time of changing values and customs.

Already antagonistic towards Eva, Medeiros receives an anonymous letter indicating her involvement in inciting a slave rebellion on his farm. Furious, he wants to expel her from his home. Octavio, claiming that her intentions are honest and explaining that such an extreme action might precipitate the rebellion, convinces his father to allow her to stay. As the day of the threatened rebellion nears and because Medeiros has held back from following his instinct to expel Eva, Medeiros’ full contempt for Eva is revealed: “todo o seu odio se voltava para a sobrinha, por julga-la causadora fatal de grandes males futuros na familia” (118). When the rebellion comes to pass, and Octavio is seriously wounded, Medeiros seeks his revenge. Again, he wants to expel Eva from his home; again, he is stopped by Octavio. In his denial of the changing nature of Brazilian society and law, Medeiros believes that expelling Eva will resolve the problems he faces on his farm. He believes that he can stop the march of time and the threat to his
social position. Octavio, knowing that the tide of social change cannot be stopped, repeatedly prevents him from evicting Eva.

Eva, upon hearing of Medeiros’ disdain for her, has an urgent desire to leave his home. Ironically, she lives with her uncle’s family because it was her father’s wish. This independent woman displays a loyalty and a respect for her father’s authority long after he has died.

Lembrava-se com amargura da ultima vontade expressa por seu pai, queria segui-l-a e obedecer-lhe em tudo. Ele tinha sido um homem raro, bom, justo, caritativo, afectuoso e incapaz de um acto leviano; sempre reflectido, sempre sereno, sempre cheio de bôa fé e aureolado de virtudes. (163)

To Eva, authority is attained not by having achieved a status of power through owning land or becoming the family patriarch, but by being a good man who acts according to his conscience. Eva respects earned authority, but not the assumed authority Medeiros represents.

Change again confronts Medeiros’ authority when a neighboring farmer asks for his daughter Noémia’s hand in marriage. Medeiros, having successfully ordered his first daughter to marry, fully expects Noémia to do as he says. Noémia protests, citing Eva’s conviction that women should not marry without love. Medeiros, again seeing Eva as the force of unwanted challenge to his values, becomes angry and insists that Noémia marry the young man. Without telling his daughter, he sets a wedding date.

Medeiros grows more sullen. Long tracts are spent describing the “good ol’ days,” when fathers were sure of their positions, controlled their families without question and chose their children’s spouses. Medeiros forlornly reflects, “os espiritos dos moços rebelaram-se contra as leis estabelecidas” (232). This is Medeiros’ greatest flaw,
as plantation owner and as patriarch: his loyalty to the established rules keeps him from accepting change which could improve the productivity of his farm and ameliorate relationships with his family. Medeiros still believes that a man’s position, indicated by his wealth, guarantees him respect. This belief is echoed by minor characters in the novel, men of great wealth and status, who idealize the past and fear the future.

Abolition, the major signal of the future they fear, is on their doorstep, however.

Abolition, the change Medeiros has feared most, comes to pass. And he has learned that Eva, whom he always held responsible for the rebellion on his farm, was not, in fact, involved in the uprising. As the novel closes, he attends Eva’s wedding to Paulo, the man who runs her farm, and feels remorse. “Abraçou a sobrinha com ternura, como se puzesse naquele abraço toda a amizade que tão injustamente lhe retirara sempre” (327). Medeiros, although still not pleased about abolition or its effect on his position as landowner, realizes that he cannot control change. He is repentant, but he is unhappy. He seems not to know how to proceed with his life. Forlorn, he goes home, where the new Italian maid is setting the dinner table.

A família Medeiros has the intricate twists-and-turns and dramatic elements that would have made it interesting to contemporary readers, who first read it as a serialized novel. There is a love triangle: Octavio falls in love with Eva, who is in love with Paulo. It is Paulo whom she marries, causing the dejected Octavio, who had always expected her mutual affection, to move to the city of São Paulo. There is action and intrigue: the conspiracy of the slave rebellion unfolds slowly, with Octavio, trying to prove that Eva was not involved, piecing together the truth. His detective work brings him upon another rebellion in progress, as the slaves become ever more courageous in their attempts to free
themselves. There is a tainted history full of misunderstanding: the story of the rift between Medeiros and his brother involves both love and murder. And, finally, there is an unexpected disclosure at the end: the Medeiros family discovers that a long-time family friend was responsible for both the murder which caused the rift between the Medeiros brothers and the rebellion on Medeiros’ plantation.

Aside from the intrigue and love triangles of the genre, A família Medeiros also includes detailed scenes reflecting Brazilian plantation life at the end of the nineteenth century. Almeida, in her desire for accuracy, uses local dialect, often explained in footnotes. Her lengthy detailed descriptions of flora and fauna, typical of the Realist/Naturalist novels of the period and evidence of their influence on her, often extend for many paragraphs, up to several pages. Specifically, Almeida’s descriptions of Santa Genoveva, the Medeiros’ farm, and Mangueiral, Eva’s farm, reflect her devotion to detail. Almeida purposefully juxtaposes descriptions of the two farms: her characters comment on the beauty and prosperity of Mangueiral, where the workers are free, versus the flawed Santa Genoveva, where the despondency of the slaves has led to negligence, obvious in the general disorder of the farm and the failing productivity of the crops. Her attention to physical detail serves to strengthen her moralistic argument about the progress of society and the abolition of slavery.

A família Medeiros has been criticized for the aspects mentioned in the last two paragraphs. Wilson Martins records the defects of the novel. In addition to his criticisms of minor stylistic details, such as pervasive footnotes or the narrative redundancy characteristic of serialized novels, Martins makes a noteworthy point, finding fault with the “diálogos artificiais . . . e bem entendido, a intenção moralizante: os personagens
dividem-se em dois grupos nítidos, os escravocratas, todos criminosos, perversos e desumanos, contrastando com os abolicionistas, todos nobres, generosos e esclarecidos” (1: 399-400). Martins makes a valid point in criticizing the depictions of the escravocratas and the abolitionists. Due to Almeida’s moralistic position on the abolition of slavery, her characters do tend to fall into simplistic characterizations based on their positions regarding slavery. She sacrifices complexity in her characters, and in the expression of their beliefs, in order to make her point. Martins criticizes the dialogue which, conversely, had been praised by Pereira for its naturalness (271). Martins may have found the artifice to be the straightforward nature of the dialogues: Almeida’s characters readily confront controversial topics, such as abolition and other issues of social progress, and stipulate their pro/con positions forcefully, without allowing for the complexity of the issues. As Martins notes, the escravocratas are clearly bad people, concerned only with oppressing others and maintaining their positions, while the abolitionists are humanitarian and care only about the quality of life of the slaves. Never does a character, in thought or in word, express any doubt regarding his position. The escravocratas do not admit the possibility that their primary concern about abolition remains the productivity and prosperity of their farms, which they fear will be harder to maintain under wage labor. Never do the abolitionists address the fact that abolition will not resolve the issues of inequality in their country. The characters argue these issues as if they lived in a simple, right versus wrong, world. The dialogues are set up as debates on an issue, and not as the difficult, awkward, and hesitant discussions that often precede large-scale social change.
Martins’ primary bias in his analysis of the content of the novel is to concentrate on the theme of abolition. Certainly, abolition is central to the development of the plot. And Martins is not alone in commenting primarily on that aspect of the novel. Oliveira Lima, in writing about Almeida, comments: “ela se teria facilmente tornado uma outra Mrs. Beecher Stowe, se a instituição maldita não estivesse no seu país para expirar, ninguém lhe desejando a perpetuidade” (167). Lima, Martins, and others, discount the true complexity of A família Medeiros, that of the series of multifaceted “threats” to the established order represented by Medeiros. The truly notable fact regarding the issue of abolition in this novel is that Almeida wrote it between 1886-1888, before the decree was issued. She did not simply see and reproduce a change which had already occurred; rather, she wrote a novel that dealt with issues of a society on the cusp of major change. And A família Medeiros, with its romantic and melodramatic residues, explores the issue of this and other societal transitions on a personal level. For this aspect alone the novel is worthwhile as a reflection of life and social issues in turn-of-the-century Brazil.

The Greek Tragedy of A viúva Simões

Almeida paints another absorbing portrait of life in turn-of-the-century Brazil in A viúva Simões. However, whereas it was the changing conventions of society that wrought havoc on the Medeiros family, it is the widow’s changing needs and ideals, in counterpoint to society’s need for social stability, that devastate the Simões family. Maria Angélica Guimarães Lopes (1999) describes A viúva Simões as a Greek tragedy: “como em tragédia grega, os deuses perseguem os mortais, acabando por aniquilá-los, mas a hármatia [sic], a falha trágica artistotélca, é francamente veiculada pela caracterização. Assim, o cego amor de Ernestina por Luciano, que tem muito de
obsessão infantil, precipita a catástrofe” (qtd. by Sharpe, Introduction 13-14). Ernestina, obsessed by her rekindled affections for Luciano and driven by her need to reclaim this love after having sacrificed passionate love during her marriage, clashes with society’s expectations. In doing so, she battles directly with her daughter, whom she loses spiritually if not physically. Ernestina, who had defined the essence of her existence in terms of her role as a mother, cannot bear the loss. At the end, she sends Luciano away, depriving herself of the very thing she had most wanted, and dedicates herself to caring for her mentally-challenged daughter.

As the novel opens, the recently widowed Ernestina focuses entirely on her home and family. She obsesses about the minutiae of the daily housekeeping, to the exasperation of her five servants. And she avoids public outings, except in cases of necessity. “A viúva não fazia outra coisa senão mandar; entretanto não lhe sobrava tempo para mais nada!” (36). She keeps herself occupied but finds herself prone to sad moments because of the monotony of her life. Ernestina is at the tricky “in-between” age that Almeida focuses on in this novel and in Eles e elas, her book of monologues/dialogues: “O corpo cansado não reagia, e o pensamento nadava preguiçosamente em idéias vagas, coloridas pelo romantismo da idade em que as alegrias e entusiasmos da mocidade já não existem, e em que as friezas da velhice ainda não chegaram” (A viúva Simões 36-37). She is past the flower of her youth when she could have easily found another husband, but she is far from the “friezas da velhice” that would cause her to stop desiring a man. Ernestina’s desire to stay independent is directly related to her eighteen year-old daughter Sara.

Por causa dela renunciava aos divertimentos do mundo, exagerando as suas atribuições caseiras. Tinha medo de apaixonar-se um dia, fugia do
Ernestina, newly independent, hesitates to change her life in any way: she continues to focus on her home and on her daughter.

Soon, however, Ernestina’s exclusive dedication to home and family is tested by the return of her first love, Luciano, who has been living in Europe since leaving her without an explanation so many years before. News of his whereabouts reawakens her feelings. “Afinal não houvera amado nunca outro homem como amara aquele!” (43).

When Luciano appears on her doorstep, he quickly declares that he would not have lived so long in Europe had she not married. Ernestina instantly regrets her haste in marrying Simões, because of anger and loneliness, after Luciano left for Europe. Thus, setting up the premise of the novel, Almeida exposes the Romantic influence on her writing.

Almeida’s novels nod to the Romanticism that preceded her: the Octavio-Eva-Paulo love triangle of A família Medeiros and the rekindled romance of A viúva Simões certainly display the sentimentality inherent in that movement.

Ernestina recognizes, however, that Simões was a good husband. She had chosen him initially as an act of revenge: “queria casar, ser rica, vingar-se de Luciano, que a perseguiu sempre nos bailes, nos teatros, em toda a parte, e que afinal, sem uma explicação, deixava-a para ir para França!” (51). She chose Simões, then, because he could provide her with the life of comfort and luxury she wanted. In a classic contrast of the material and the emotional, she sacrificed love for wealth and status. “O comendador Simões tinha sido um bom marido, carinhoso, cortês, sempre pronto a dar-lhe tudo quanto ela desejasse, vestidos caros, casa ajardinada, mobílias modernas, vida farta,
comfortável e doce” (51). While she had not loved him when she married him, she grew comfortable with him and, with the birth of her daughter, her affection for him was solidified. She had a good life with Simões, but she now begins to question the basis of that life, as she looks longingly at the alternative she could have had with Luciano. Her happy dreams in this scene are cut short when Sara enters. Luciano, disappointed that Ernestina had a child with Simões, immediately dislikes Sara. Before leaving, he tells Ernestina that he finds Sara ugly and adds that, before becoming a mother, Ernestina herself had been more attractive.

After this first meeting, and despite its rather negative conclusion, Ernestina’s comportment changes quickly. She becomes forlorn, first because of her disappointment with Luciano’s comments but soon because she regrets her life with Simões and imagines that she would have been happier with Luciano. Luciano, on the other hand, confides in his close friend, Rosas, that he is interested in having a physical relationship with Ernestina but does not want to marry her. Rosas advises Luciano, “Agora, fora de caçoada, não se ponha a brincar com o fogo inutilmente. A Simões é séria; você deve evitar a convivência, visto não querer casar. Conheço bem a nossa sociedade . . . isto está feio . . . ” (70). The ideal, socially-defined boundaries of their relationship, made explicit by Rosas, are of no interest to Luciano, who continues to pursue an affair. Ernestina, on the other hand, ignores the limitations placed on her by the conventions of society in recklessly pursuing a new marriage, which she knows to be the only socially acceptable relationship. Those limitations are expressed explicitly by Sara who, as the novel progresses, repeatedly admonishes Ernestina for her increasing disregard for propriety.
Ernestina changes quickly, but incrementally. Desperate to see Luciano again, Ernestina surprises the sheltered Sara by allowing her daughter to accompany her into the public sphere, heretofore prohibited. Ernestina is embarrassed by her own behavior, which contradicts the strict rules she had previously imposed on her daughter. The mother, at this point, knows very well that her behavior is not acceptable for a woman in her position. She scolds herself for her inconsistency but does not alter her course of action.

Their first outing is a simple shopping expedition, during which the requirement of mourning attire vexes both Ernestina and Sara. Late nineteenth-century fashions reflected “the separate social roles [of men and women] and the rigid enforcement of a double standard of morality,” and the mourning requirement was no different (Besse 28). During this era, “it was scandalous when women abbreviated their mourning, particularly when girls married soon after a parent’s death, or when a widow remarried quickly. Etiquette manuals carefully discussed the timing of full and half mourning” (Borges 212). As an outward expression of a woman’s loyalty and morality, mourning attire was directly linked to a woman’s respectability. The decision to cease mourning, then, would not have been taken lightly. Nevertheless, as Ernestina dresses for the outing, “a lã preta do luto repugnou-lhe; aquele traje áspero e triste não era o que o seu corpo desejava” (81). Ernestina wants to rid herself of her mourning attire because of her renewed love for Luciano. Unconcerned, for a moment, with her social standing, she wants to shed the reminders of her old life and pursue her youthful dream. For Sara, “a moda sorria-lhe, chamava-a para fora daquele luto, daquela vida austera, concentrada e simples do seu chalet” (84). Sara simply wants to begin her public life. She is not eager to forget her
duty to her father, rather she is excited about entering adulthood and society. Neither woman, however, sheds the dark clothes proscribed to her.

Luciano’s second visit signals the complete transformation of Ernestina: no longer does she fight her feelings for Luciano but instead gives in to her obsession. The next day, Sara notices that her mother is not wearing her wedding ring. Ernestina, knowing that her behavior is unacceptable, lies, telling her daughter she has lost the ring. Ernestina, still not willing to shed her full mourning attire, has started to shed key, symbolic reminders of her old life.

After a theater outing, during which she sees Luciano and their old familiarity is rekindled, Ernestina’s obsession and subsequent misbehavior increases. Ernestina, believing that Luciano will marry her, suppresses her doubts about her behavior in favor of pursuing her goal. At this point, Ernestina has not encountered external censure for her actions; she has lied successfully and has not been chastised for her actions. Now, more sure of her position with Luciano and believing him to reciprocate her feelings, she concerns herself with pleasing him. He asks her to stop wearing mourning in order to prove her love for him. She resists, a little, but gives in to his wishes. Public reaction to this choice is obvious: Ernestina’s actions likely caused a great scandal among her peers. In addition to the public censure, Ernestina must face Sara, devoted to her father’s memory and extremely upset that her mother has removed all visible signs of her mourning. From this point forward, Ernestina becomes more estranged from Sara, who does not understand her mother’s behavior.

Sara’s encapsulates society’s judgement, which never enters the narrative. Ernestina certainly would have faced the gossip of her peers for her nonconformist
behavior, but the narrative of this novel focuses on familial relationships and not on society’s reactions to her behavior. Sara’s reasons for criticizing her mother are not based solely on social custom, however. She is upset because her mother’s behavior implies a lack of respect for her father’s memory. In this way, Sara, like Eva who lived with the Medeiros family out of respect for her father’s wishes, demonstrates that conformity with society’s expectations does not reflect only acquiescence to society’s norms. Both of these women act not out of concern for the fulfillment of a whole set of society’s rules but out of respect for the fathers they hold dear. Almeida examines the interplay between personal choice/feeling and social obligation. Sara also longs to shed her mourning attire but she chooses to fulfill her responsibility to her father as a dutiful daughter. She does not understand why her mother insists on lifting the veil of mourning, which Sara sees as an expression of personal loyalty to Simões.

The situation only worsens. At Luciano’s request, Ernestina invites Rosas, Luciano’s friend but a sworn enemy of the deceased Simões, to dine with the family. Sara is enraged, citing her father’s hatred for Rosas. Ernestina removes the ever-present portrait of her husband from the sitting room, again at Luciano’s request. Confronted by Sara, she lies, insisting that she has sent the picture away to be repaired. “Sara retirou-se, desconfiada e tristonha . . . Afinal, [Ernestina] andava a fazer um papel de culpada; temia a filha como se o seu amor por Luciano fosse coisa ilegítima ou criminosa” (121). Ernestina fears her daughter, of course, because she has been consistently lying to her since Luciano re-entered her life. Perhaps her love for him is not illegitimate or criminal, but Ernestina’s obsession with Luciano, and with the idea of marrying him, engulfs her to such a degree that she fulfills his every request, including those that make her forsake
social etiquette (lifting her mourning) and dishonor her husband’s memory (inviting his enemy into her home).

Late in the novel, Ernestina begins to understand the repercussions of her actions. Sara becomes more resentful, and Ernestina grows frustrated with Luciano’s hesitance to marry her. She knows that she is risking her relationship with her daughter and her good social standing. Frantic, she sends Sara to stay with an aunt and pressures Luciano to marry her. Soon, she begins to miss her daughter desperately, and it is then that she fully realizes her predicament: whom does she love more? She now wishes she were older, at the age where the “friezas da velhice” would have kept her from having entered this situation. It is the first time, since the beginning of the novel, that Ernestina seeks to return to the happy stability of her early widowhood. However, she is far too obsessed to save herself.

The remainder of the novel unfolds along the lines of a romantic melodrama: Luciano interacts with a more mature Sara and is immediately entranced by her. He falls in love with Sara and, torn by his affections for both mother and daughter, leaves for several months. Ernestina, perceiving a change in Luciano’s feelings toward Sara, begins to doubt herself and insists that Sara marry; Sara refuses, admitting that she loves Luciano. Ernestina, crazed by jealousy and obsession, admits that she also loves Luciano and tells Sara everything. It is Ernestina’s concealment that leads to the great tragedy of the novel: Sara, grief-stricken, falls grievously ill. Due to complications resulting from an error made with her medication, Sara will remain in a permanent vegetative state. It is this final stroke that triggers the decisive change in Ernestina: relieved that Sara is still
alive, she refocuses on her duties as a mother. She realizes the role that she played in her daughter’s tragic illness and refuses to see Luciano again. He again departs.

At the end, Ernestina is left alone to care for Sara. “Ao lado da mãe, numa cadeira de rodas, Sara, com o seu eterno e doloroso sorriso, fazia e desmanchava a única coisa bela que lhe ficara: a sua trança loura” (209). The nature of this emotional drama can be attributed, in part, to its original publication as a folhetim, or serial, characterized by extensions, suspense, and other traits that would guarantee the reading public’s loyalty to the story (Meyer 303). The romantic premise combined with the tragic ending seem to indicate that this was a divertido folhetim, a type of harlequin romance, the precursor to the modern-day soap opera. These elements could be translated easily into a dynamic tear-jerker movie. The final scene alone has magnificent cinematic quality. But A viúva Simões, even with its melodramatic elements, is undoubtedly a moral tale with a deeper message.

Wilson Martins, recognizing the high quality of this novel, commends A viúva Simões: “é um excelente romance, de grande força dramática, escrito num estilo brilhante e enxuto, com perfeito desenvolvimento narrativo . . . esse livro compara-se ao melhor Eça [de Queirós], se não for melhor do que Eça” (5: 12). His unqualified praise is especially remarkable when considering his detailed criticism of the imperfections of A família Medeiros. Martins’ História da inteligência brasileira affirmed the merit of Almeida’s work long before other scholars re-considered her novels. By considering each novel separately and not allowing one to stand for the whole, Martins tracks Almeida’s development as an author and faithfully reports her growth to his reader.
Martins clearly sees beyond the melodramatic elements and appreciates the strengths of the narrative.

The maudlin conclusion is not nearly as interesting as the process of renunciation and negotiation Ernestina undergoes throughout the novel. She renounces her previous moral code, the code by which she earned her reputation as a good woman and a dutiful wife, and also the strict and proper code by which she raised her daughter. She is then confronted, repeatedly, by her daughter and the very principles she embodied all her life. Ernestina’s process of negotiation consists of the excuses she makes for her behavior. She lies, in order to hide her new desires from her daughter, and makes increasingly unbelievable excuses for her behavior.

Ernestina, the good and dutiful woman, understands the position of a young widow in Brazilian society. At the beginning of the novel, she immerses herself in her home life and understands that her role in society is now supposed to be restricted. As Sharpe notes in her introduction to A viúva Simões:

> As limitações femininas por uma educação inadequada, o casamento visto como um contrato indissolúvel, mesmo quando os cônjuges são incompatíveis, faziam com que uma mulher enviuvada se transformasse em um estagnado membro de uma sociedade que limitava sua criatividade ao casamento e à maternidade. (21)

Ernestina accepts her limitations. Although she is able to exercise more financial independence because of her widowhood, Ernestina still must function under strict social rules that limit her freedom of action before the traditional power structure (Quinlan and Sharpe 15-16). She is an independent woman, in the sense that she does not have a husband or father in a position of direct control over her, but still a woman in an inflexible patriarchal society that exercises final authority over her.
With Luciano’s return, Ernestina’s own needs and ideals begin to change, whereas society’s limitations do not. She knows that her role in her family is of utmost importance to her respectable position in formal society. Until Luciano reappeared in her life, she played the role of perfect widow and mother. Now, however, she is faced with a difficult choice; she loves a man who does not like her daughter. As a woman, her two primary roles in life, those of wife and mother, are at odds. Ernestina, desperate for a marriage based on love, brings about her downfall through her lies and subsequent renunciation of the values she previously held sacred. Ridding herself of her mourning and other signs of her first marriage, such as her wedding ring and the prominent portrait of her husband, she forsakes the duties of a good wife. Sending her daughter away and trying to force her to marry for her own selfish purposes, she relinquishes the duties of a good mother. Again, Almeida explores, through Ernestina, the dialectic between the personal and the social. Whereas Sara’s personal choices (e.g., her strict adherence to mourning behavior and attire) reflect society’s expectations, Ernestina is faced with desires that contradict society’s stipulations. She holds her own needs above those expressed both by Sara and by society. In choosing to do so, Ernestina causes irreparable damage to her life and family.

While Almeida may have been concerned with women’s education and with raising women’s status in Brazilian society, in effect she warns here against the abnegation of the essential roles assigned to women. Ernestina, losing sight of the importance of her role as mother, loses the very thing she most holds dear: her daughter. In the end, she faithfully returns to her motherly duties, after having strayed from the correct path. She can redeem herself through her dedication to her daughter, but she will
forever bear the suffering, represented by the retarded Sara, for her sins. Ernestina provides the counterpoint to Eva’s role in A família Medeiros: Eva, though progressive in her politics, embodies respect for family and for her position within her family, while Ernestina, who renounces her duties, represents a threat to the stability of a changing society.

**A falência: Economic and Moral Failings**

A falência, like Almeida’s earlier novels, focuses on family turmoil in a transitional society. As in A família Medeiros, distress in the Theodoro family seems to stem from external causes: the repercussions of the Encilhamento cause the bankruptcy of Francisco Theodoro. The family’s troubles begin long before Theodoro’s unwise investments, however, and the Encilhamento is mere background for the more compelling drama of family relations. The real tragedy of the narrative is caused not by the bankruptcy but by Theodoro’s misunderstanding of his role within, and value to, his family.

The novel opens in the Rua de São Bento, Rio de Janeiro, infused with the smell of raw coffee and animated by the hurried movement of sweaty laborers. In a very Naturalistic manner, Almeida spends several pages describing the atmosphere of the busy street. She introduces Theodoro, the rich, satisfied and successful coffee seller at the center of all of this movement. Theodoro meets to have coffee with his friends, and they discuss the problematic politics of 1891 Brazil. All rich men, they complain about the new Republic with its weak government, the lazy Brazilian people, the unhealthy city. They see themselves as the few sensible, hardworking figures able to profit in such an environment. Turning away from their complaints about society, they discuss
Theodoro’s family, a source of undeniable pride for him. From the outset of the novel, then, the uncertainty of the social and political situation is set against the indisputable value of the family. The men close their conversation as the never-ending sacks of coffee are moved through the street.

Theodoro feels a great deal of pride in his business, as well as in his family. A self-made man, “o negocio era o seu sonho de noite, a sua esperança de dia, o ideal a que atirava a sua alma de adolescente e de moço” (28). A poor immigrant without an education or any financial support, he achieved his status through years of hard work and the denial of any luxury, such as the comforts of women or of a real home, in his life. Once financially secure and settled, he decided that his life was lacking something and that he should marry and have children. He met the beautiful Camilla, quickly married her, and settled into a calm life with her, interrupted occasionally by his infidelities. “Nem a pobre Camilla desconfiara nunca . . . Tambem, nada lhe tinha faltado e já devia ser um regalo para ella cobrir de boas roupas o seu corpo de neve, ter mesa farta, e andar pela cidade atraíndo as vistas, no deleite da sua graça” (37). Theodoro expects that his perfidy means little when compared to the good life he provides to his wife and family. He defines himself and his family’s well-being by his financial success. Dain Borges, writing on Brazilian families during this period, notes,

the ideal man was not a lord, but a man of affairs, a counselor. His power derived not from military chieftainship but from control of political influence or financial capital. Cosmopolitan urbanity was the ideal of the man’s manner in public. (66)

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2 Orthography adheres to the 1901 edition of A falência.
Borges could have been writing about Francisco Theodoro’s life philosophy, for his entire understanding of success is based on his finances and the appropriate display of his wealth.

Theodoro muses about the niceties of his bourgeois life: his beautiful palacete in Botafogo is filled with family (including Rachel and Lia, his young twin daughters, Ruth, his talented violinist daughter, defiant son Mario, and Nina, the poor niece he has agreed to house) and close friends (including Dr. Gervasio Gomes and Captain Rino). Arriving home, Theodoro hosts those friends at a dinner of complex dishes and fine wines. His opulent table is a sign of his triumph in life, his great wealth. These first few moments, in the store and in his home, paint Theodoro’s life as one of contentment in its bourgeois luxury. However, as the evening ends, the first sign of the faltering foundation of Theodoro’s satisfaction appears. Although not witnessed by other members of the family, “lá, em cima, no terraço, ao lado do marido adormecido, Camilla curvou-se para o Dr. Gervasio e beijou-o na bocca” (52).

Dr. Gervasio, who first met the Theodoro family when called upon for Ruth’s typhoid fever, enjoys a close relationship with the family. Having met Camilla as a simple housewife, he has taken her on as an improvement project in a desire to transform her into a graceful lady. He advises her on her social behavior, her manner of dress, the décor of her home. As Xavier comments, “Esta mulher prendada, boa mãe e esposa dedicada, no convívio com o médico da família – Dr. Gervásio –, homem culto e refinado, transforma-se e acaba amante dele . . . Ela vive com o amante o grande amor que não teve pelo marido” (Declínio, 17). Obviously, Theodoro’s blind belief that his financial success defines his family’s happiness is false. Almeida’s Realist/Naturalist
influences are apparent in her use of the theme of adultery as an avenue of character development: “Para [Gervasio] aquella ligação foi uma victoria; para ella como que uma lei de fatalidade” (73). Camilla’s relationship with Gervasio, and her subsequent improvement from plain housewife to elegant lady, corresponds to her decline from dutiful wife to deceitful adultress. Her outer refinements belie her affair.

Camilla, although she loves Gervasio and continues her relationship with him, fears the repercussions of her actions. When he recommends a novel to her, one with a love story like theirs, she replies:

Então não leio. Sei que está cheio de injustiças e de mentiras perversas. Os senhores romancistas não perdoam às mulheres; fazem-nas responsaveis por tudo—como se não pagássemos caro a felicidade que fruimos! Nesses livros tenho sempre medo do fim; revolto-me contra os castigos que elles infligem às nossas culpas, e desespero-me por não poder gritar-lhes: hypocritas! hypocritas! Leve o seu livro; não me torne a trazer d’esses romances. Basta-me o nosso, para eu ter medo do fim. (67)

Gervasio tries to comfort her, insisting that their romance will not end. He claims that she should not have regrets. She remarks that her husband has been unfaithful to her since their first year of marriage and asks, “Qual é a mulher, por mais estupida, ou mais indifferente, que não adivinhe, que não sinta o adulterio do marido no proprio dia em que elle é commettido?” (67). Camilla knows that she is expected to ignore her husband’s infidelities, but her reflections on contemporary novels indicate her awareness of the moral double-standard imposed on her.

Ann Pescatello, who writes on the images of women in Machado de Assis’ writing, provides an example of the double-standard as expressed in literature: “suffering must be borne by a woman and always seems to be more acute than Estacio’s [in Helena] or the twins of Esau and Jacob, or the men of Dom Casmurro, for example” (40).
Pescatello underscores Camilla’s point about repercussions women faced for their actions in nineteenth-century novels. In women’s magazines, school books, etiquette manuals, and Church publications, in summary, the normative literature of the epoch:

wives were warned that whereas other faults could be overlooked, she who failed in her love would never be forgiven. Even if her husband were to betray her and lie to her, she was to pardon him, say nothing, and accept that “for men, one woman alone is not enough.” (Besse 77)

While she should ignore her husband’s perfidy, Camilla must accept punishment for her own actions. Deeply in love with Gervasio, she is well aware of the risk she takes and she fears the repercussions she will endure.

Camilla also tries to hide other problematic situations from Theodoro. She lies to him about their son Mario’s whereabouts, trying to protect him from his father’s anger. Mario, a rebellious young man who occupies himself with spending his father’s fortune, is having an affair with an older woman, which would greatly anger his father. Camilla enlists the help of Noca, a family servant, in hiding Mario’s nightly absences from his father. When Theodoro finds out, and becomes angry, Camilla tries to resolve the situation by speaking with Mario, expressing her disappointment in his behavior. She pleads for him to think about his family’s reputation. He responds, angrily, “Reputação! ora, mamãe, e é a senhora quem me falla nisso,” because he knows about her affair with Gervasio (114). Enraged, he gives her an ultimatum: she must choose between her lover and her son. Camilla again dwells on the double-standard: all those times that her husband had pursued other women, and now she must be faced with the bitterness of her son for her behavior. Camilla is starting to pay the price she had feared.

Almeida further contemplates gender equity issues, such as the moral double-standard, through a conversation on differing attitudes about women’s proper behavior.
One day, Theodoro, Camilla, Ruth and Gervasio lunch on Captain Rino’s boat. Rino’s
sister Catharina serves them. Theodoro, praising the food, notes that Brazilian women
have a special way with seasoning, “é verdade, verdade, assim como ella não devia ser
chamada para os cargos exercidos por homens, tambem os homens não lhes deviam
usurpar os seus. A cozinha devia ser trancada ao sexo feio” (145). Catharina,
representing feminism, by late nineteenth-century standards, observes that Theodoro is
against the emancipation of women. He quickly responds, “Minha senhora, eu sou da
opinião de que a mulher nasceu para mãe de família. Crie os seus filhos, seja fiel ao seu
marido, dirija bem a sua casa, e terá cumprido a sua missão” (145). Theodoro espouses
the Positivist belief that the sexes have biological and mental differences that ascribe
different duties to them (Xaver, Declínio, 21). While the voice is masculine, the attitude
reflects Almeida’s own implied position: Camilla’s suffering, as she renounces her
primary obligation as honest wife and mother, underscores Theodoro’s point. However,
the presence of Catharina, albeit a minor character, whose convictions are closely aligned
to those of Eva in A família Medeiros, indicates Almeida’s desire to explore the various
currents of thought on the issue. If Camilla’s affliction seems to suggest Almeida’s
conservative gender politics, equally notable is the inclusion of women who espouse
progressive beliefs in both of these novels.

Theodoro continues his observations on women and comments on their moral
challenges: he compares men, with the honesty of black coats, to women, whose honesty
should be a white satin dress. Which one is harder to keep clean? He has the utmost
respect for women: “Realmente, deve ser bem dificil saber defender um vestido de setim
branco que nunca se tire do corpo. Eu não sei como ellas fazem, e, francamente, não me
parece que a vida mereça tamanho luxo” (148). The reader can interpret Theodoro’s comments as an indication of his awareness of the moral double-standard and/or the relative burden women carry, but he reinforces the double-standard in his ideas regarding gender relations. He is not a progressive man, nor does he claim to be. Camilla does not disagree with him.

Every year, Theodoro celebrates family birthdays by throwing huge parties, with lavish banquets and dancing until dawn, for which no expense is spared. For Theodoro, these parties are symbolic of his triumph in life, his tremendous financial success, and he very much enjoys them. Camilla, still upset about Mario and her situation, which appears to be unraveling, reacts badly to his desire to organize another grand party. Gervasio, who is, as always, at the house when Theodoro mentions the party, decides it would be a good idea. He believes that the planning will pull Camilla out of her depressed state, evident since Mario confronted her about their affair, and refocus her energies on day-to-day life. He offers to help.

As the entire household begins to prepare for the upcoming party, Theodoro watches the preparations with great satisfaction:

Nunca os filhos saberiam o que era uma infância como fôra a sua, desagasalhada, errante; nunca a mulher saberia o que era ter um desejo sem esperança de satisfação, e a todos envolveria sempre o luxo, a abundancia e a alegria. (310)

His desire for continued future success threatens the happiness of his family, however. While his family is in the long process of preparing the house for the party, Theodoro is approached by a business associate about an investment proposal. Theodoro wants to spend his money on his house and his family, not in risky business investments. But his associate, Innocencio Braga, promises him that this deal is a “fio d’ouro” (251). He
explains that Brazil is a land of promise, that it is important to know when to take advantage of an opportunity. Theodoro, initially reluctant, but tempted by grand promises, gives in to the smooth-talking Innocencio. Theodoro, who made his fortune on his ambition and not on his keen business sense, has been deceived by a charlatan. Theodoro must declare bankruptcy.

Completely disheartened, Theodoro contemplates suicide. Overtaken by memories of his poor childhood, he cannot bear to return to that life. He believes that he has devastated his family. Camilla, at first concerned only with the loss of her former life, becomes upset and complains bitterly that Theodoro did not trust her enough to tell her about his problems. Soon, however, seeing her husband’s sense of defeat, she begins to feel great compassion for him. The family follows suit and quickly accepts the loss. But Theodoro cannot accept his new life; he cannot bear to think of Camilla without fine silks. He blames the Republic, his lack of education, his ineptitude in business. He does not blame his one greatest fault however: his belief that his financial success in life defines him and his perpetual drive to increase his wealth. He firmly believes that “cada homem é criado para um fim” (387). Believing that his bankruptcy represents a total failure on his part, Theodoro feels guilty that he has not been able to fulfill his purpose, and therefore has let his family down. He wants some kind of physical punishment for his failure. He kills himself as Camilla enters the room.

Camilla repeatedly re-envisions the death scene. She is beside herself with grief. Ironically, she feels that “o amava na sua dôr, mais do que o tinha amado na sua felicidade” (390). Camilla could accept his failure. Money had brought the family nothing but pain: “o dinheiro . . . tem uma conotação negativa; leva ao ócio e também ao
pecado como no caso de Camila; e é responsável pelo demônio da ambição, levando Teodoro ao suicídio” (Xavier, Declínio 19). Camilla had never defined her happiness by Theodoro’s fortune, and the absence of that fortune made her feel closer to her anguished husband. But now, poor and alone, she is compelled to move to a smaller house. Camilla, whom Theodoro could not imagine without fine silks, is now forced to support herself and her family.

Mario suggests that Camilla marry Gervasio, who could save her from her poverty. Camilla, uninterested in Gervasio after Theodoro’s suicide, resists but finally complies with Mario’s desires. Upon visiting Gervasio, however, Camilla is surprised to find out that he has been married for many years. She leaves, hopeless, feeling as though she is now in her second widowhood. She has no salvation.

Oh! ser honesta, viver honesta, morrer honesta, que felicidade! Se pudesse voltar atrás, desfazer todos aqelles dias de sonho e de ebriedade, recomeçar os labores antigos na insossa domesticidade de esposa obediente, sem imaginação, sem vontade, feliz em ser sujeita, em bem servir a um só homem, com que pressa voltaria para evitar esta humilhação, peior que todas as mortes, porque vinha d’elle [Gervasio], que ella amava tanto! Amava ainda. Ainda! (437)

Camilla sees her current misery as the direct result of her adultery. The tragedy of Gervasio’s novel, of the woman made to bear the agony of her sins, has come true. The theme of adultery was a common one in the nineteenth-century Brazilian novel and, because of Machado de Assis’ exceptional skill in delineating adulterous affairs, became an avenue of psychological analysis, as reflected in this quote. Camilla defines her moral failure on the same terms as her husband characterized his business failure; both see the cause of their suffering as their failure to fulfill their primary purpose in life. Because of her feelings for Gervasio, Camilla ceased being an honest woman, a good wife and
mother. Because of her enormous sense of guilt and regret, Camilla finally accepts the moral double-standard that she has bemoaned throughout the novel. And she accepts that her final punishment is to endure this suffering while still loving Gervasio. Unlike Theodoro, however, Camilla is able to accept her undoing. Whereas he commits suicide, she returns to a simple life. Advised by Nina, “faz bem, tia Milla . . . o trabalho distrae,” Camilla distracts herself from her misery by focusing on work (439).

The true tragedy of A falência is Theodoro’s misunderstanding of his role as husband-father in society. His sense of self was as much defined by his childhood poverty as by his success as an adult. When successful and rich, he had a cheating wife, a rebellious son, and a troubled household. Broke, he had a family united in its resolve to move forward. The irony of his situation is that his wife, estranged from him and in love with another man, felt closer to him in his failure than she had in his success. But Theodoro felt he had nothing left to offer his family. Instead, he left them to a life of absolute poverty, with no hope of an exit, by committing suicide. His fatal flaw resonated in his inability to accept the new circumstances of his life and to move forward. He cursed the Republic, the changing politics and economy of Brazil, but did not pause to reflect on his own role in his demise. He tried to profit from changing times, but was not adaptable enough to proceed when faced with failure. His suicide is his ultimate failure, in that it robs Camilla, and their daughters, of their futures.

And Camilla? Was Almeida, like the other authors she criticizes, making Camilla pay for her sins? The question of Camilla is far trickier than that of Theodoro. Certainly, some passages seem to indicate Almeida’s very conservative views concerning the role of women in society. Camilla’s final observations, especially, point to a learned lesson
regarding the importance of women’s roles within the family. Her new understanding could have been taken directly from a Brazilian 1898 Catholic girls’ textbook, in which the wife’s credo read, “I dedicate myself entirely to the happiness and honor of my husband. My life must be all abnegation, all obedience, all work” (qtd. by Borges 159). The ideals represented by Camilla and by the textbook are extremely conservative. A woman’s role in the family is idealized, but within the strict limits of patriarchy.

However, Camilla’s affair with Gervasio is subordinate to the greater tragedy of Francisco Theodoro. Almeida, in reflecting on the double-standard implicit in Brazilian society and in discussing feminist progressiveness in the character of Catharina, does not seem to blame Camilla for the family tragedy. Certainly, Camilla’s behavior is immoral and she causes further problems with Mario, but Theodoro’s own stubborn pride causes the downfall of his family. One could even surmise that Camilla’s attraction to Gervasio stemmed from Theodoro’s lack of interest in and lack of involvement with his family.

Wilson Martins praises A falência and compares it to the best novels of Eça de Queirós, as he did with A viúva Simões. He praises its description of city life, which include both portraits of the wealthy sector and lengthy descriptions of poorer zones of Rio. Further, Martins notes “depõe mais contra a crítica e os leitores do que contra a romancista que um romance dessa qualidade tenha praticamente caiído no esquecimento” (5: 195). Martins, an objective scholar and not simply a fan of Almeida’s writing, indicates that both critics and readers have ignored a great work. Contemporary publishers, in rescuing A viúva Simões, A falência and other Almeidian novels from obscurity, make the same argument. Martins, writing in 1976, was simply ahead of his time in recognizing the value of this novel.
José Veríssimo, writing when *A falência* was first published in the early 1900s, also praises it, although he notes that it is the work of a writer not yet in full possession of her gift (*Estudos*, 84). He comments that the bankruptcy itself “é a parte mais fraca, e a parte verdadeiramente fraca do romance, em que se sente a imperícia da mulher, mesmo bem informada, para tratar um assunto que lhe não é familiar ou adequado” (81). At first reading, this comment seems simply sexist, and one can assume it to be a typical example of the types of attitudes women faced during Almeida’s lifetime. Additionally, artists in general were regarded as weak in business sense, so Almeida, as a woman writer, is doubly doomed to her lack of understanding. The criticism merits further analysis, however. It is true that Almeida, known for her dedication to detail and accuracy, leaves the business negotiations between Theodoro and Braga vague. She speaks to the philosophy of the investment, but not to the details, a simple yet effective literary convenience.

In criticizing this aspect of the novel, however, Veríssimo seems to miss the point. The bankruptcy is a means of further exploring the character of Francisco Theodoro as well as that of his wife. Actually, Almeida’s lack of detail helps to portray the essence of Braga’s trick; the deal is not well-defined, neither to Theodoro nor to the reader. What does a man who defines himself by his financial success do when he loses everything? Almeida creates the bankruptcy to explore that very issue. *A falência* can be seen as another moral tale, not unlike that of *A viúva Simões*, about an individual’s behavior, and the way his/her behavior affects the family.
The Unstable Families of the Early Novels: Unrest and Upheaval

These three early novels focus on the intimate lives of bourgeois families. All three occur within the last fifteen years of the nineteenth century, a time that was particularly difficult in a Brazil that was struggling with a new political system (the new Republic), a changing social order (abolition), and a volatile economy (Encilhamento). Almeida’s portraits of these families are complex and not, as Pereira criticizes the “sorriso da sociedade” writers, simply a method of distracting herself and her readers (246). While criticizing Almeida as one of these writers, Pereira does highlight A família Medeiros and A falência as having special merit, justification for which has been highlighted in the foregoing discussion. The families of these novels, while wealthy, suffer direct consequences of the political, social, and economic transitions of the country.

Almeida constantly examines the interaction between the personal and the social. The outside world has definite repercussions in her families’ private homes. Their behavior is also explored along the personal/social divide. While most of her female characters appear, to their surrounding public, to be virtuous, Almeida divides them into categories of virtue or immorality based on their personal choices. Eva, acting out of regard for her dear father’s wishes and not with concern for surface propriety, plays the role of the dutiful daughter and retains her good status. She is the only female character who gets a happy ending. Sara, also out of true respect for her father, fulfills her role as good daughter though Ernestina, even while still acquiescing to society’s expectations, loses her honor when she begins to deceive her daughter in blind pursuit of her own needs. Although Sara acts with integrity, her tragic ending is linked to her mother’s
duplicity. And Camilla, who hides her deceit with a sophisticated social persona, also suffers for her sins, although Almeida indicates that she has the opportunity to rectify her life with hard work. Both Camilla and Ernestina realize that they have erred, and the novels end on the note that they can make amends by re-focusing on their priorities. Almeida’s novels can be viewed as Naturalist thesis novels that attempt to prove a position much like scientific method proves a hypothesis. Almeida “proves” that women suffer when they renounce their duties as proper wives and mothers and that women find happiness when they adhere to society’s rules. Almeida’s women, then, are judged on a moral standard and their endings have a definite moralistic tone.

Almeida’s men also suffer, but are not defined by the saint/sinner duality. Medeiros and Theodoro both suffer for their assumption that their status defines them. These men, seeing themselves in clearly defined roles in a patriarchal society, associate their worth and power with their wealth and their inherent positions of authority. Medeiros fears that societal changes, especially abolition, threaten his status. He does not understand that accepting these changes, and reforming the work environment on his farm, may actually increase his wealth and status. Theodoro is not as afraid of change, and instead seeks to profit from a changing economy, but believes that he has lost his worth and authority when he loses his wealth. In terms of the private/public realms, both of these men looks to society to determine their worth. They are concerned with society’s definitions of value and importance. Medeiros finally realizes that society’s tenets are changing and so he, too, must change, though he does so unhappily. Theodoro, unfortunately, continues to look to society, and to the unchanging construction of its
social hierarchy, when he should look to his family for their support. For his inability to do so, Theodoro’s ending is the most tragic of these three novels.

At times, Almeida’s resolutions are decidedly conservative—witness Camilla’s epiphany at the end of *A falência*—but at other times she furnishes a progressive ending—Eva, in *A família Medeiros*, has a happy marriage and successful, modern plantation. Her novels and characters are not easily labeled as ascribing to one philosophy or exhibiting singular features. Almeida introduces her readers to complex families in a dynamic, ever-changing society.
CHAPTER 3
THE GENDERED EXCHANGES OF ELES E ELAS

In Eles e elas (1910), Júlia Lopes de Almeida compiles a series of thirty-seven brief (1000-2000 word) monologues and dialogues that focus on spousal relationships. This collection, first published as a series of newspaper columns in O País between 1907 and 1910, merits separate discussion from the novels discussed here for several reasons. Eles e elas, the only non-novel selected for discussion, represents a different genre which, unlike the novels, offers slice-of-life vignettes characterized by direct commentary on gender relations within the family and without the contrivance of a plot. In terms of the author’s œuvre, this collection can thus be separated, both by tone and by motif, from her early works and from her later novels. Of the seven books considered in this thesis, Eles e elas embodies Almeida’s most dramatically open discussion of gender roles. Her exploration of gender-related tensions here accentuates the effects of social norms on the dispositions, perceptions, and interactions of husbands and wives. Focusing on the disconnect between the ideal of a loving marriage and the unhappy reality of women forced into severely limited and undervalued roles, Eles e elas offers an excellent opportunity for further discussion of problematic familial relationships in a society in transition.

The tone of many of these pieces is light-hearted, as they focus on common complaints regarding husbands’ vices (smoking, gambling, drinking) or wives’ overspending. Darlene Sadlier, while noting that “their criticisms are always couched in the
context of a loving relationship, and the tone of the book seems only mildly satiric, like a
comedy of manners,” also admits that “there are some dark ironies concealed beneath the
calm surface” (575). Indeed, several of the vignettes reveal a harsh undertone suggesting
social inequalities and power imbalances between men and women.

These monologues and dialogues focus on themes familiar from Almeida’s early
novels: women’s complete economic dependence on their husbands; the double standards
of a society in which a woman must bear her husband’s infidelities but herself remain
unquestionably virtuous; the familiar condescension experienced by undereducated
women in their own homes; and the rigid moral expectations forced upon women to place
the needs of their husbands and children above their own. The large number of pieces
and the variety of speakers allow Almeida to explore several different types of familial
problems, as opposed to focusing on the dynamics of single families and homes as she
does in her novels.

Still, Almeida concentrates primarily on a few specific motifs that highlight the
negative aspects of the intimate lives of elite women. Of the thirty-seven sketches,
eleven emphasize wives’ forced acceptance of their roles of wife and mother and
subordination to their husbands’ virtual control over their lives; five highlight the moral
double-standard to which women had to adhere in tolerating the sins of their husbands
while themselves remaining above reproach; and twelve focus on husbands’ criticism of
their wives’ frivolity, unreasonable decision-making, or lack of practical skills. The
majority (75%) of the pieces, then, relate to five issues: the significance of domestic
labor, the imposed standards of morality, the self-sacrificing ideal of motherhood,
women’s seemingly inferior intellectual abilities and practical skills, and their (resulting)
complete dependence on men. The dominance of these issues suggests the themes to be
discussed in this chapter. Noting the oppressive aspects of the relationships depicted in
the collection, Peggy Sharpe remarks that Almeida launches “a series of barbed critiques
on the cultural practices of the bourgeois family where power and domination establish
the organizational framework of social life and reproductive roles order the world of
work” (“Production and Consumption” 155). This collection offers readers a critical
glance into the lives of elite husbands and wives, and into the gender-specific ideals and
expectations of a society in flux, within the context of brief narrative pieces.

The Value of Domestic Labor

A sua obrigação de bôa esposa é estar em casa, não fazer nunca sentir a
sua falta, e estar sobretudo naquela hora [de jantar] sentada naquela
cadeira, dirigindo o movimento do serviço. Minha mulher é-me tão
indispensável á mesa, como o pão, o saleiro, a garrafa de vinho ou o
guardanapo.1

The narrator of this piece, entitled “Ah! os senhores feministas!,” is a husband
who is exasperated because his wife is out when he arrives home for dinner. His
statement reflects the predominant attitude towards a woman’s roles in the household,
those of good wife and reliable homemaker. He recognizes that his wife is essential, but
his description of her as an object, comparable to the bread, the salt shaker, or the napkin,
completely devalues her contribution to the household and dehumanizes her. Throughout
the monologue, the husband expresses his rage, repeatedly using the word raiva, and
complains strongly about the behavior of his wife. During his rant, however, he receives
a telegram reporting that his mother has fallen very ill and that his wife is by her side. He
is relieved to learn that his wife is fulfilling her duty, rather than shopping or strolling in
the streets. Having been obsessed with the inappropriateness of his wife’s absence from
the house, and blaming the “feminist men” who allow such indulgences of their wives,
the husband becomes calm only when it is revealed that she is actually completing one of
the familial tasks expected of her. A moment earlier, he was unable to dine without her
presence at the dinner table; in one breath, he forgets his irritation and calls his children
to dinner. Being able to continue with dinner, despite her absence, indicates that this
family has servants. Assuming so, the wife’s presence at the dinner table is not necessary
in fact for the functioning of dinner, but his insistence upon it reflects the husband’s
conviction that his wife belongs in the home, always ready to cater to the family’s needs.

This vignette, ostensibly one of the lighter pieces because the husband loses his
steam in the end, reflects the ideal, pervasive in nineteenth-century Brazil, of the rainha
do lar. This metaphor suggests a certain level of power and authority afforded to women,
and women did have a great amount of authority in the running of their households.
“Inside the house, she had more control than the man. It was she who organized the
domestic routines of the household and oversaw the kitchen” (Borges 56). However,
women’s uncompensated domestic labor was not recognized as “work” in the same sense
as men’s external, remunerated professional endeavors. While the husband in this
vignette notes the importance of his wife at his dinner table, he later remarks, “Para a
mulher, o marido talvez seja alguma coisa mais complexa; para o marido, porém, a
mulher é sobretudo um hábito” (78). With this statement, he again dehumanizes his own
wife, disregarding her efforts in creating and overseeing a comfortable home, and offers
his perspective of male-female relations. He indicates that a wife is not recognized by

1 P. 74. The orthography of this chapter adheres to the 1922 edition of Eles e elas, published by Livraria
Francisco Alves.
her husband as a valuable contributor within her family: she is merely a habit, a necessary routine in the execution of one’s life duties.

Reflecting Almeida’s presentation of men’s attitudes towards women’s duties, Alice Brant, as a young girl in the mining region of Minas Gerais, noticed the lack of respect for women’s work in her community. In her 1895 diary, she writes, “Papa is much beloved in my family. Everybody likes him and says he’s a very good man and a very good husband. I like hearing it but I’m always surprised at their just saying that papa’s a good husband and never saying that mama’s a good wife” (trans. and qtd. by Hahner 58). Brant goes on to detail her mother’s day, which involves cooking, cleaning, and running the house from dawn until well into the night. Almeida, then, raises a crucial issue for nineteenth-century women: women’s work, focused entirely on home and family, was not a valued endeavor.

In addition to expressing a general disregard for his wife’s contributions to the home, the husband in “Ah! os senhores feministas!” is particularly displeased because he believes his wife is out in the public sphere when her role should be limited to activities within the private sphere of the family home. He equates her outing with the freedom that feminism, to which he ascribes a completely negative connotation, advocates. As the monologue’s title, expressed by the husband in his first line, reflects, this husband blames the men that allow independence in women more than he blames his wife for her excursion. “São as suas teorias desordenadas, subversivas . . . que têm posto a sociedade neste estado” (73). Ironically, the husband credits men, and not women, with women’s expanding roles in public life; it is the conduct of the “feminist men,” and not the actions or demands of women, that have altered the level of participation in society afforded to
women. This husband does not even consider women as players in society, but associates them only with life in the home. Therefore, he bemoans the loss of tradition, the loss of the comforts of home, and is only reassured when notified that his wife is fulfilling a task appropriate to her traditional role as caregiver. She is not out in the public sphere, which he sees as a clearly masculine realm, but remains in her place. “The various allusions to men’s ‘public’ and women’s ‘private’ worlds emphasize the socially constructed nature of gender,” as opposed to reinforcing beliefs in biological, and therefore natural, gender differences (Sadlier 576). Almeida indicates the existence of socially constructed norms by contrasting the new roles for women against the traditional, familial expectations and ideals of women. This theme, of separate spheres of activity, arises repeatedly throughout this collection and serves as commentary on both men’s and women’s attitudes toward the changing and broadening opportunities for elite women in late nineteenth-century Brazil.

Women’s Virtue

Supuz que em amor, como em religião, as intenções valessem tanto como as obras consumadas e merecessem o mesmo castigo; mas parece que não é assim, e para me não aflingir, meu marido será capaz de confessar sem reboço que só por pensamento pecou com a minha querida amiga . . . Não; o melhor será calar-me; que ao menos o meu orgulho sirva de capa ao meu amor próprio ofendido; sofrirei em silêncio, que é o único modo digno de sofrer. (43-44)

The protection of a woman’s virtue also forms part of the discussion of women in the public sphere, although it does not appear to figure among the husband’s concerns in “Ah! os senhores feministas!” In Brazil, as in many nineteenth-century Western societies, a woman’s honor was profoundly connected to her husband’s honor. Women were expected, throughout their lives, to behave according to strict moral codes. “Honor
required that women’s roles be restricted. The Brazilian ideology of women’s honor stressed that a woman’s only essential characteristic in the ideal marriage was *pureza*, purity” (Borges 203). With sexual purity deemed the most essential part of a woman’s honor, many rules, such as limited entrance into public spheres, were imposed to protect women’s virtue during the nineteenth century. The ultimate symbol of her family’s honor, a woman should have a limited public life, constantly supervised by a respectable male companion, in order to avert temptation.

Men were, of course, judged by a different standard. In *A falência*, Francisco Theodoro offers an astute simile that illustrates the moral double-standard; he describes women’s morality as that of a white satin dress, harder to maintain and more likely to be sullied than the black coat to which he likens men’s honor. The tensions caused by gender-specific codes of conduct is as apparent in the wife narrating “É exquisito . . . ,” from which the quotation opening this section is taken, as it is in *A falência*, when Camilla reveals her knowledge of her husband’s affairs, which he believed to be concealed. Forced to accept their husbands’ infidelities, these women bemoan the double-standard in which social convention has trapped them.

The wife in “É exquisito . . . ” suspects that her husband is having an affair with her friend but avoids confronting him because she knows he will never admit that he has cheated. Because a man’s intention is pardonable, so long as no action was taken, he may even acknowledge that he has had thoughts about the friend. The wife knows that she is powerless in this situation; her husband will deny any infidelity and she will be made to look like a fool. She decides that it is best to suffer in silence, retaining her dignity by not allowing her accusations to be refuted. The husband, on the other hand,
would not only confront his wife, but would have the right to shun her. Men of the time would even be pardoned for killing their adulterous wives. “Adultery was the ultimate humiliation, and custom required that a man ‘wash out the dishonor with blood’ by murdering his wife and her lover” (Borges 203). This custom was so accepted that it provided men with a legitimate legal defense if tried for the murders (Borges 204).

Notably, however, the wife of “É exquisito . . . ,” while lamenting the double-standard she so easily recognizes, chooses not to act against her proscribed role. She will retain her dignity by suffering in silence, as she has been taught to do by parents and the moralist literature of the era. To criticize the content of such literature, Elizabeth Agassiz, a foreign traveler to Brazil in 1865-1866, recounts an incident indicative of the rigid moral codes imposed upon women. While perusing a book on her visit, she was interrupted by a family’s patriarch, who insisted that the book was not appropriate for women. Instead, he offered her another book that he had purchased especially for his wife and daughters:

Abri o precioso volume, era uma espécie de tratado de moral, cheio de banalidades sentimentais e de frases feitas em que reinava um tom de condescendência e proteção à pobre inteligência feminina, porquanto, apesar de tudo, as mulheres são mães dos homens e exercem um pouco de influência sobre sua educação. (qtd. by Lajolo and Zilberman 245)

Agassiz asserts that acceptable reading for women reinforced cultural norms because of the predominant belief that women needed constant reminders, due to their innate gender limitations, of how to fulfill their roles. This literature taught women, like the wife in the above monologue, that they must endure their husband’s indiscretions while remaining above reproach themselves. While Almeida’s criticism of the moral double-standard in “É exquisito . . . ” indicates a disapproval of the way women’s education trained them to
acquiesce to society’s unjust expectations, she then emphasizes education as integral to the fulfillment of women’s primary, and most idealized, role: mother.

The Cult of Motherhood

Within the home-family-woman triad that was exalted in the nineteenth century, motherhood played an especially significant role, both in consigning women to the private sphere and, eventually, in expanding their opportunities for education. In “O inimigo,” a mother addresses her newlywed daughter, who threatens to divorce her husband, with whom she is fighting and whom she sees as the inimigo, about the challenges of marriage and family life. She admits to her daughter that she raised her believing that she existed only to be loved and cared for by her mother. Knowing all along that she would one day have to surrender her daughter to a husband with whom she would create her own family, the mother still felt shocked when her daughter fell in love. After giving all her love and care to her daughter for so many years, she was left empty. Still, she knows that she has fulfilled her role as mother and, despite the dismay that she initially felt at losing her daughter, she never questions the essence of that role.

Home and family were intricately connected for nineteenth-century Brazilian women. They were expected to marry, to run their households, and to educate their children. Caring for and teaching their children were their most important roles as
mothers, which was their most important role as women. Along with primary education, which prepared women for their wifely and motherly duties, women’s journals further reinforced the cult of motherhood. In A família, Almeida writes about the sacrifices of motherhood:

Ser mãe é:
renunciar a todos os prazeres mundanos, aos requintes do luxo e da elegância, aos espectáculos em que se ri ou em que se chora, mas em que o espírito se deleita e se abre avidamente, com a sofreguidão dos sequiosos; é deixar de aparecer nos bailes, de valsar, de ir a pique-niques sem temer o sol, o vento, a chuva, uma independência feliz; é passar as noites num cuidado incessante, em sonhos curtos, leves como o pensamento sempre preso à mesma criaturinha rósea, pequena, macia, que lhe magoa os braços, que a enfraquece, que a enche de susto, de trabalhos e de prevenções, mas que a faz abençoar a ignota providência de a ter feito mulher para ser mãe! (qtd. by Bernardes 170)

Almeida, offering her own opinion in the A família piece without the contrivance of fiction, speaks from the same class perspective as does the mother of “O inimigo.” In neither composition does Almeida question the accepted norm that women were born to be mothers. Almeida is adding to a subject established by other authors, including Coelho Neto, who wrote a poem entitled “Ser mãe,” in which he expounds the virtues of motherhood in terms that echo Almeida’s sentiments. While admitting that motherhood is often difficult and sad, Almeida, and others such as Coelho Neto, reinforce the accepted cultural norm that woman and mother are one in the same. It is for statements like these that Almeida is judged by late twentieth-century scholars (such as Bernardes and Lajolo and Zilberman) to be “conservative,” a determination that is inaccurate if only for the imposition of late twentieth-century standards upon a nineteenth-century woman.

However, Almeida also knew that motherhood was inextricably linked to the education of children, and she argued for the improvement of women’s education, as did
women’s journals of the time, as a vital component of their ability to fulfill their sacred duty as mothers. “A incumbência de educar os filhos foi repetidamente ressaltada pelas jornalistas como uma das mais importantes tarefas femininas, para cujo desempenho foram sugeridas melhores condições educacionais” (Bernardes 161). Women’s journals and writers like Almeida espoused better education for women, capitalizing on the cult of motherhood to further their goals. In her Livro das noivas (1896), a manual for young brides, Almeida writes, “Aprender para ensinar! eis a missão sagrada da mulher. É preciso para isso que a sua leitura seja sã, bem feita. O gosto bem educado transmitir-se-á sem mácula e sem esforço aos filhos” (qtd. by Lajolo and Zilberman 264). While not yet advocating drastic social change, Almeida attempted to work within accepted social roles for the betterment of women.

While “O inimigo” does not address education, Almeida, who both reinforces the cult of motherhood and laments the inadequacy of women’s education in this collection, sets up a model of social change that does not threaten the status quo. As Peggy Sharpe writes in her introduction to A viúva Simões, in which Ernestina reaffirms her primary role as mother after straying from the correct path, “a sacralização do papel materno pode ser vista na obra de Júlia Lopes como uma tentativa de colocar a educação feminina no centro dos problemas sociais, econômicos e políticos mais amplos da sociedade brasileira” (24-25). Almeida portrays women’s motherly roles as sacred, as evidenced by the mother’s acceptance of her duty in “O inimigo,” and Almeida’s proposal for better education, in other pieces, is made in such a way that it will not undermine that very crucial role.
Women’s Education and Intellectual Abilities

As mulheres pensam . . . Não! as mulheres não pensam, devaneiam apenas; e isso mesmo às vezes . . . Pois eu não vejo? se querem agir por si, ao mínimo embaraço olham logo em redor, procurando socorro! Ainda não encontrei uma única que soubesse fazer um simples requerimento sem pedir conselho ao homem mais à mão . . . que deliberasse negócios sérios com a suficiente clareza . . . que se não deixasse arrastar mais pela fantasia que pelo bom senso, nem se desprendesse, em momentos de resolução, de certas ninharias e contemplações sentimentais . . . (154)

The limits of women’s education are clearly portrayed by the husband speaking here in “As mulheres pensam . . . .” He complains about women’s inability to think sensibly, practically, rationally. He grumbles about his mother’s naïveté in assuming that a man can get a good job if he is qualified. Women, he assumes, do not understand the complexities of the patron-client system, in which the recommendation letter is not only highly influential but a practical necessity in gaining a prominent position. He admits that his wife gives him good advice, from time to time, but he attributes it to the vagaries of chance. He believes women to be ridiculous, learning to play the piano but often not achieving any real level of mastery, focusing so much time and energy on their silly toilettes, prodding their husbands to confide in them about businesses that they do not understand. As the monologue closes, the husband, unable to find a match in the house and unable to proceed with his work without smoking, wakes his wife to find him a box of matches.

This monologue depicts the dominant attitudes toward the intellectual abilities of women at the turn-of-the-century. The husband criticizes women, his mother and wife in particular, for their inability to be logical thinkers and for their inability to understand the complexities of the “real world.” Ironically, while criticizing her ignorance of the outside
world, he needs his wife’s help for a simple task in the home. He does not, however, admit his own clear limitation. Her recognizes the home as his wife’s domain, although he does not appear to respect that realm or her mastery of it. He focuses instead on the qualities that make women unprepared to enter the public sphere.

Women’s education was intricately linked to this sexist notion of their intellectual abilities. The superficial education women received gave them skills necessary to become wives and mothers. Additionally, elite girls were taught to dance, to speak a bit of French, to sing and play piano, all for the purpose of making them shine in public, that is, when they were allowed, under the supervision of fathers and husbands, to enter the public sphere (Besse 114). Women’s schooling did not yet extend to educating them to be active citizens. Those who tried to further their education were met with criticism: “desgraçadamente no Brasil . . . ao contrário das belíssimas nações cultas, a mulher que estuda, que pensa, que sente os eflúvios do benéfico influxo da ciência, é objeto de críticas e censuras à sua própria dignidade” laments Maria Amélia de Queiroz in 1890 (qtd. by Bernardes 127). Queiroz offers a harsh criticism of Brazil by comparing it to the refined nations of Europe, after which Brazil modeled its educational structures and cultural production, where women were encouraged to study. By striking contrast, women in Brazil were taught to read morally sound novels and the light, romantic novels offered to them by the publishers (Lajolo and Zilberman 258). Women were trapped, in a vicious circle, by their instruction: they were neither taught nor encouraged to be great readers or learners and, as both a cause and a result, they were neither expected nor compelled to seek intellectual pursuits.
Almeida highlights the negative effects of this cycle through the criticism, expressed by the husband in “As mulheres pensam . . .,” aimed at his wife and mother. Clearly, he does not respect the intellectual abilities of either. He closely resembles the insulting husband from another dialogue, “Se eu fôsse outra . . .,” in which the wife complains bitterly about her husband’s condescension, most recently illustrated when he called her an idiot. The wife in that monologue, crushed by the ill-treatment she has received from her husband over the years, contemplates a variety of retaliations, including spending all of his money, divorcing him, or killing herself. The wife’s reflections highlight the tensions caused by male attitudes towards women’s intellectual abilities, limited both by their education and by the meager literary offerings aimed at them.

Several monologues in *Eles e elas* address women’s feelings of inferiority, often caused by the disdain of their husbands. The husbands in the collection complain that their wives are dull and know little of the world; wives complain that their husbands treat them like children and speak to them with condescension. Noting this pattern of disparaging treatment in spousal relations as well as the generalization indicated by the removal of identifying labels, such as personal names and locales, one can presume that Almeida meant to offer a broad societal portrait of the gendered hierarchy in Brazil. Women’s lack of education and preparation for the outside world, in addition to exposing them to condescension from their husbands and fathers, also made them completely dependent financially upon the men in their lives.
(In)Dependence

De humilhada que me sinto, parece-me então que me contentaria com o mais humilde cantinho da terra e que despida de todos os luxos, roendo hervas crúas como os cabritos, eu me sentiria mais gloriosa, por mais independente, do que nesta contingência de pedir, de precisar . . . (21)

The wife in this monologue, “Cada vez que . . . ,” is embarrassed because, upon asking her husband for money for the household expenses, he questions why she needs more: “Oh, já acabaste com todo o dinheiro que te dei ontem?!” (21). Her husband, from whom she must constantly ask for money for the family’s expenses, makes her feel like a beggar. She would prefer the most humble, independent life rather than face this situation, in which she must justify every payment. Since women’s education in the nineteenth century would not prepare them for professional lives, a “humble life” would be her destiny if left on her own. Women were raised to be wives and mothers, and little prepared for independent lives.

Women, whose education focused on domestic tasks, were often educated at home and had few opportunities for further study. In 1879, institutions of higher education, at the high school but not university level, were opened to women, but very few attended. Women were still raised to fulfill their roles as wives and mothers and they did not have a permanent place in the workforce.

Ironically, the potentially grim condition of widowhood actually bestowed a greater independence on women. No longer dependent on their husbands, widows were able to take a leadership role in their families and were allowed to control their own finances. Bernardes, in studying fifty years of selected prose fiction (1940-1890) by male writers Machado de Assis, Macedo, Alencar, and Azevedo, notes that “no quadro
composto por vinte e duas viúvas . . . projeta-se a idéia geral de uma posição de autonomia na família” (86). The characters of the nineteen novels studied by Bernardes reveal that only by fulfilling her role as wife and mother can a woman satisfy society’s expectations and realize the eventual possibility of her own independence. Almeida’s novels further support this contention: the widows of her novels, Ernestina in A viúva Simões when she functions autonomously and Maria in Correio da roça as she works to improve her farm, exercise a productive independence.

While providing the example of fruitful, independent widowhood through Ernestina and Maria, Almeida makes the point more explicitly through the narrator of a monologue called “Nessa mesma tarde . . . .” The young widow refers to the “estado de viuvez, que é o único que lhe confere [à mulher] independencia” (177). While other women in Eles e elas, when unhappily married, contemplate divorce (at least two women specifically refer to it as a solution to their problems), divorce is not treated as an acceptable option, but as an extreme action to garner attention. Widowhood truly is depicted as the sole avenue towards real independence. There are no never-married, single women in Eles e elas. Bernardes, in her analysis of nineteenth-century prose fiction, indicates that single women were threatening to the status quo: “Ao contrário das viúvas, o grupo de cinco solteironas necessita de apoio e compreensão. Quatro delas, esperando ainda encontrar marido, vivem ao lado de parentes a que são submissas” (88). All of the single, independent women of Almeida’s novels, like Eva in A família Medeiros, are only single until they find an appropriate husband. Although her ideas are progressive and she seemed happy to be single, it is interesting to note that Eva does indeed fulfill her civic and moral duty by marrying.
In addition to the established roles, some pastimes were open to elite women, and allowed them a socially acceptable level of independence. Júlia Lopes de Almeida, as a writer, pursued a common activity for educated women. Almeida, while conservative on many levels, used her influence as a writer and public figure to advocate women’s education. She herself had to make sacrifices to pursue her vocation, focusing on her family first and on her writing only when not needed by her husband or children. While putting her family first, as she was expected to do, Almeida was also critically analyzing gender relations, as in *Eles e elas*, and advocating women’s education and involvement in larger society. Almeida used her privileged position, as one of a very few women with both the education and the opportunity to influence others, to dissect the issues that faced Brazilian women and families of her time.

**Gender and Dialogue in *Eles e elas***

Through our exploration of the various dominant beliefs (the primacy of domesticity, virtue, and motherhood) and practices (education, limitations on independence) that surfaced within Almeida’s collection, certain themes have woven in and out of the discussion. Formal education and women’s journals were factors that both reinforced the status quo and argued for progress, a duality which the collection itself reflects. Almeida’s short narratives themselves form a dialogue, with some pieces clearly echoing or opposing other pieces in the collection. As Sadlier notes, the frustrated husband, complaining of his wife’s inability to make a decision in “Reparaste?” could form a dialogue with “Não posso ter uma abstracção,” in which a young bride complains that her husband must know her every thought. The husband in the first piece does not understand his wife’s reticence to enter the public sphere where he, as a man, feels so
comfortable, while the wife in the second piece cannot express her private, free-flowing thoughts to her husband, who seeks to rule his home with the same “ironlike logic” he uses in business (Sadlier 580). “The self-contained nature of the narratives and the general absence of proper names in He and She [Sadlier’s translation of the title] encourage the reader to draw associations between male and female voices other than those juxtaposed to one another in the collection” (579).

The sketch in which a wife suspects her husband of having an affair with her friend, discussed in relation to standards of morality, could easily be coupled with a monologue in which a husband expounds the virtues of Mimi, thinking of her as a woman far superior to his wife. The monologue in which the husband expresses his irritation with “feminist men” for allowing their wives out into the public sphere too often, could be chatting with his friend, a husband who refuses to let his wife accompany him to the theater. She proclaims, “uma só alma em dois corpos é uma metáfora inventada pelo diabo em hora de ironia” (107-108). Here, as in other places, Almeida expresses women’s feelings of frustration with gender hierarchy in strong language that clearly questions socially-proscribed norms.

While Almeida presents the devoted mother who dedicated herself entirely to her daughter’s happiness, she offsets that traditional representation with startling images of unhappy women. The woman who feels like a beggar every time she asks for money finally recognizes her dependence on her husband and states, “Eu retorno o meu lugar” (25). The passivity with which she accepts her hierarchical inferiority, acknowledging her feeling of powerlessness in the situation, contrasts with the vigor with which she professed her anger. Far more of the women’s monologues are agitated in tone than not,
indicating that Almeida perceived distinct problems in the customs, attitudes, and gender expectations of her society and her era.

Peggy Sharpe, in relating technology to dominant attitudes, aptly assesses the gender divide by analyzing spheres of activity:

Male narrative voices describe their wives as emotionally unstable and intellectually inferior beings whose consumer mentality interferes with their desire to carry out their household administrative duties, especially those that entail the well-being of the patriarch. Dissatisfied wives bewail the vanity, egotism, and indifference of their husbands who enjoy all the privileges associated with the public sphere: a work world away from the private sphere, access to the technology of modern life, and the liberty to control their sexuality without scrutiny. Men wake up anxious for telegrams, debate the pros and cons of installing telephone service in their homes, and live out their fantasies through the consumption of images while women divide their attention between the administration of the household and catering – albeit never wholeheartedly – to the needs of their bourgeois husbands. (“Production and Consumption” 156)

The public sphere, here, has an increasing level of importance in providing individuals with access to modernity and all that it entails. “As landscape, the world of modern technology in these monologues and dialogues announces the increased value attributed to the public sphere—the masculine realm—with its changing notions of time, work, and social relations” (156). In addition to “Ah! os senhores feministas,” several other compositions address the issue of women in public spaces: a husband complains to his friend that his wife goes out too much and insinuates that his wife must be having an affair to have a reason to leave the house so often; a wife gripes that her husband has gone to the theater without her, claiming that her attendance is not worth the cost and that he is concerned about economizing; and another wife fears that her husband may not let her leave the house unaccompanied because a friend is alleged to have met an attractive young man on the street. The women in this collection eagerly await their access to this
public sphere and their active participation within it, while their husbands reassert their control of both the public sphere and their private homes.

The general themes of *Eles e elas*—men’s versus women’s traditional roles and resulting spheres of activity, intellectual interests and ability, and proportionate levels of power—point directly to the influence of culture upon family relations. This collection does not address the effects of historical events, as the early novels do, but does address the gender-based assumptions and behaviors learned from society that create spousal and familial tensions, evident throughout *Eles e elas*. Almeida uses the collection as a forum to discuss general problems in gender relations, shown to be larger societal and class issues through anonymous speakers. While all of them are clearly from the upper echelons of society, they have no individual characteristics, no identifying traits or factors that would make them singular instances as opposed to representations of common systems of belief.

The women of *Eles e elas*, though still locked in traditional gender roles that restrict them from power and independence and force strict familial and moral expectations upon them, are conscious of their limitations as externally-imposed, as opposed to biologically-defined, and it is this consciousness that shapes Almeida’s collection. Almeida gives voice to their awareness and to their doubts, empowered by her position as a writer to bring attention to issues little discussed in polite society. She depicts a society based on difference and she highlights the tensions created when that difference begins to be not only questioned but contested. Almeida offers no distinct lesson here. She negotiates a delicate line between pressing for change and affirming the value of traditional roles; she argues for progress but qualifies her progressive vision of
increased education and independence with idealized portrayals of women in their consummate roles as attentive wives and sacrificing mothers. Almeida, unable to offer clear or easy solutions to such complex problems, offers these narratives as a form of exploration of gender inequality and leaves her readers with the responsibility of formulating their own conclusions.
Júlia Lopes de Almeida’s early novels, illustrating the effects of the abolition of slavery and the declaration of the Republic, analyzed the social, political and economic upheavals of a transitional society as they touched homes and families. In her late novels, written after the most turbulent period of change, Almeida concentrates on the family as it relates to and shapes society, as opposed to how social change affects the family. The protagonists of these novels do not react to external, national transformations, but instead instigate change through the redefinition of their families’ roles in larger society. Almeida’s late novels shift attention to the steps that individual homes and families took in establishing the order and progress envisioned in Brazil. Almeida, betraying her Naturalist influences, offers “thesis novels” that demonstrate the suitable, successful path for the new families of the new Brazil.

* A *intrusa* (1908), set in the home of Argemiro, a wealthy carioca lawyer, portrays the effects of the upwardly mobile middle class on the perceived power of the elites. The title refers to the Baroness’ conviction that Alice, the young governess in her widowed son-in-law’s home, is an intrusion (making her an *intrusa*) in her life. From the outset, then, the novel reflects elite perception of the rising classes and not the socio-economic realities or aspirations of those classes. The Baroness, a member of the old aristocracy, fears losing her position of influence to this young working woman and it is the
Baroness’ basic mistrust, and subsequent attempts to discredit and dismiss Alice, that creates the central conflict of the novel. In *A intrusa*, Almeida posits a moral tale about the merits of hard work, portrayed as central to the modern Brazilian family, against the backdrop of a leisured aristocracy in decline.

*Correio da roça* (1913) begins with another elite woman who is unable to accept social change. Maria, however, facing her loss of status, and money, after her husband’s death, exemplifies the adaptability of the elite. As the narrative unfolds, Maria transforms the melancholic farm to which she has been exiled into a beautiful, happy, successful estate where her family has found renewal. The initial turmoil caused by Maria’s husband’s death is transformed, through education and rigorous labor, into a personal success for Maria. Maria’s achievements reach beyond the boundaries of her small estate, and reverberate as a message for the nation regarding the future prosperity of Brazil. As with *A intrusa*, Almeida offers a moral lesson about the value of hard work, but extends her point beyond the personal level to a larger national view.

While these first two novels focus on women and their work, *A Silveirinha* (1914), with its focus on the carioca elite in their favorite summer vacation spot, Petrópolis, seems like lighter fare. The novel focuses on Silveirinha’s attempts to convert her husband, Jordão, whom she sees as an atheist. As opposed to tales emphasizing the rewards of work, the intrigues of the elite surround the primary story of Silveirinha’s troubled marriage. This novel would have maintained readers’ interest with melodramatic elements; it does not overtly tackle the kinds of issues others novels in this chapter do. Yet one must look closer at Almeida’s depictions of elite life and religiosity. Her criticism of the elite in *A Silveirinha* is much more direct than in the earlier novels.
While members of the elite are depicted as progressive and sympathetic in *A intrusa* and *Correio da roça*, those who surround Silveirinha in Petrópolis are portrayed as pretentious and immoral. While Silveirinha’s religious devotion may at first seem moral and right, especially compared to the behavior of those around her, she is unduly influenced by an egotistical priest, who represents the decay of the Catholic Church. Tellingly, on the cover of the 1997 edition of *A Silveirinha* appears a 1923 quote by Frei Pedro Sinzig, “*A Silveirinha* é uma ofensa à sociedade e à Igreja Católica.” Almeida uses *A Silveirinha* to criticize not only the Church but many aspects of elite Brazilian society. Offering us no moral ending, again unlike the other novels, Almeida provides her characters with happy endings, though not without a hint of irony. Her depiction of elite life is much more complicated here than in the other two novels and her solutions are neither so easy nor so perfect. *A Silveirinha* provides a good counterpoint to the other novels discussed in this chapter.

These final three novels re-focus on the family, altered by life-changing, though not national, events. The adaptability of the protagonists of these novels contrasts with those of the earlier novels who were unable or unwilling to adjust to changes in society. By depicting the happiness and success of these families, Almeida demonstrates the benefit of philosophical and behavioral change among the elite. Argemiro, Maria, and Jordão redefine their roles in their families and thus act as instigators of positive change, and the inflexible characters like the Baroness, or Medeiros and Theodoro from the earlier novels, find themselves on the outside of the new social structure of Brazil.
Argemiro, the wealthy, widowed lawyer of *A intrusa* is a prime example of the progressive attitude necessary to construct the new Brazil. He works to bring his daughter back to his home and to rebuild his nuclear family. Lonely after his wife’s death, which resulted in his daughter’s removal from his care to be raised by her maternal grandparents, Argemiro endeavors to bring Maria da Glória back to the city. Citing her need for a better education than that provided on the farm, he finds a sensible reason to bring the daughter he adores and misses back into his life. He decides to hire a governess in order to bring his daughter home, knowing, all the while, that his decision as a single father to raise his daughter is unorthodox and that it will cause problems with his stately mother-in-law, the Baroness.

Argemiro’s proposal to hire a governess, a necessity to have his daughter living at home, quickly evokes his friends’ commentary apropos their regard for women. He is quickly warned, “feia ou bonita, a mulher é sempre perigosa” (10). Argemiro, however, retorts, “saberei indicar-lhe o seu lugar. Nem quero vê-la, mas sentir-lhe apenas a influência na casa. É a minha primeira condição” (10). His friends regroup to warn him again, claiming that the women who respond to the employment advertisements have ulterior motives. They recommend that he hire an old woman so as not to be tempted. Finally, Argemiro’s friends, anticipating the impossibility of finding an older, educated governess who will agree never to interact with her employer, concede the argument. What they never allow for, however, is that a woman in Argemiro’s household could serve as a positive factor in his life. This notion, of woman as dangerous, is present
throughout the novel in the scandalous gossip caused by the governess’ presence in Argemiro’s home.

From the outset, Argemiro’s peers predict that the governess, seeking to ensure her prosperous future, will seduce him. They warn him against the deceitfulness of women from the lesser classes, the hopeful arrivistes of the bourgeoisie and petite bourgeoisie, or social climbers, who only care about material gain. Argemiro, however, is sincere in his cause: he believes that he can hire an honest woman to raise Maria da Glória, to mold her into an educated, proper young woman. He misses the influence of a woman in his home, but the influence he seeks is that of his daughter, not that of a servant.

Despite his friends’ warnings, Argemiro places an advertisement for a governess. In doing so, he betrays the wishes of the Baroness, who has been caring for Maria da Glória for seven years. The Baroness, more distrustful of the potential governess than Argemiro’s friends and afraid of losing her position of influence with her son-in-law, tries to undermine his plan throughout the novel. The central conflict, then, is played out in the intimate realm: while the reader knows, from the first interactions between Argemiro and his friends and from their remarks throughout the story, that his peers find his actions questionable, the primary tension, arising from the perceived loss of power of the Baroness, focuses not so much on the greater social circle as on the unconventional Argemiro and his aristocratic mother-in-law.

One day, a young woman, with an “ar vexado,” arrives and asks for the “dono da casa” (13). These few words, both those that describe the as-yet-unnamed Alice, soon to be governess, and those pronounced by her, are notable because they reflect one of the
rare instances in which Alice appears in the narrative. She remains conspicuously silent, speaking only five times throughout the story. Almeida concerns herself not with Alice’s voice, but with the power struggle between Argemiro and the Baroness and with the Baroness’ conviction that Alice is a threat, seeking to disrupt her life. This novel is about the elites’ perceived (loss of) power and, while Alice’s hard work is apparent in the renewed order of the house and in Maria da Glória’s improved behavior, the story is not really about her. The title A intrusa (the intruder), again, reflects the Baroness’ perception of Alice and does not reflect on the real nature of Alice’s presence in Argemiro’s home.

To the surprise of Argemiro’s friends, Alice accepts the central condition of her employment, that Argemiro never see her. Argemiro’s concession to the arguments of his friends, and to his mother-in-law, is that he will never interact with Alice nor even see her in his home. While Argemiro’s decision to raise Maria da Glória on his own may be unconventional, he wishes to avoid any appearance of impropriety. He emphasizes, in conversation with his good friend Padre Assunção, that he dislikes Alice, “Desta gostei pouco. Pareceu-me acanhada, toda torta” (18). He reiterates that his wife, on her deathbed, beseeched him not to remarry and that he has fulfilled her wishes. Seven years after her death, Argemiro continues to feel Maria’s presence in the house and kisses her portrait every night before going to bed. He reiterates that he is thrilled that his daughter, whom he describes as a wild girl with the ways of a young boy, will be trained as a proper young woman. He is excited to have her fill his sad home with youthful happiness. This conversation with the priest further underscores Argemiro’s sincerity in only wanting a governess so as to have his daughter at home.
Only after hiring Alice does Argemiro travel to the farm to tell the Baroness of his plans. As Elôdia Xavier notes in her introduction to the 1994 edition, “a descrição desta personagem—‘cabelos completamente brancos,’ ‘faces flácidas,’ ‘carne do pescoço descaída’—dá a medida do declínio de uma classe e de seu desespero diante da perda do poder” (IV). The Baroness represents the old aristocracy, threatened by the rise of the lesser classes, and, as the narrator notes, “a antipatia da avô sugerira-lhe instintiva repugnância por essa intrusa” (38). While the Baroness continually attempts to convince Argemiro that she is concerned only with her daughter’s memory, her dislike of Alice stems from a far deeper source: her fear of losing her position of power, both at the familial level and in greater society, to Alice and her corresponding social class. In the end, Argemiro is unable to win the first battle: he agrees to allow Maria da Glória to continue to live with her grandmother, but demands that Maria da Glória visit him regularly, heretofore not practical because of his inability to care for her without assistance. Threatened and uneasy, the Baroness retains some control over the situation.

Alice’s influence is apparent almost immediately. Maria da Glória’s day visits soon become overnight stays. She then seeks to extend her visits in the city and returns less often to the Baroness’ estate. On a behavioral level, she is quickly transformed. Her manners improve immensely. Padre Assunção observes, “a obra de Alice era de paz e de benefício. Fora ela que modificara as impetuosidades daquela criança, cuja vontade onipotente dobrava tudo e todos a seu belprazer” (69). Influenced by the Baroness’ conviction that Alice will cause the ruin of her family, however, Assunção doubts her intentions. He knows her to be from an upstanding family, but his experience in the confessional has taught him that corrupt people often emerge from honorable families.
While Padre Assunção is trying to determine Alice’s true character, the Baroness is firm in her resolve that Alice is disingenuous, “e desesperava-a a idéia de atirar Maria [da Glória] todas as semanas para aquele poço de hipocrisia e de imoralidade” (73). She fixes herself in her antagonistic position and uses every opportunity to convince Maria da Glória, Argemiro, and Assunção that Alice must be removed from the household.

While the Baroness’ actions are clearly related to her loss of power within his household, Argemiro’s friends, for their own reasons, continually warn him of the dangers of his circumstances. They distrust Alice, despite the general improvement in Argemiro’s home and Maria da Glória’s development under her tutelage. They suspect an illicit affair and continually gossip about it. One friend chides him, “aviso-te de que já se sabe por aqui que tens uma ménagère moça, bonita . . . e que os conceitos são naturais. Quero dizer: maldosos” (101).

Argemiro, while insulted by his friend’s insinuations, cannot deny his growing contentment. He admits to another friend,

É extraordinário. Desde que esta mulher entrou em minha casa eu sou outro homem, muito mais tranqüílo e muito mais feliz. Nunca a vejo, mas sinto-a; a sua alma de moça como que enche estas salas vazias de juventude e de alegria . . . sentindo a influência dela, percebendo-lhe os gostos finos, que em tudo se demonstravam, comecei a exigir de mim hábitos mais corteses e a tratar a minha pessoa com mais consideração e maior carinho . . . Nunca surpreendi a minha governanta . . . mas ela vinha e vem ao meu encontro num aroma fresco de pomar florido, e que eu nunca sentira antes da sua estada nesta casa. Tu o disseste há bocado: “Está-se bem aqui! (109)

Argemiro begins to love Alice because of his association between ordered home and family. With the return of his beloved daughter and the restoration of the comforts of home, his new situation correlates quite well with the old, with only one exception: the presence of a wife-mother figure. He becomes fascinated by the mere sense of a
woman’s presence. What he knows about Alice, other than her fine taste and sweet smell, is limited, at best. But she has completed his home, which he believed to be so lonely at the beginning of the novel, when he asserted, against his friends’ warnings, “uma casa sem mulher . . . é um túmulo com janelas: toda a vida está lá fora . . .” (3). His description of his improved behavior, as well as of the comforts of home, underscore his earlier statement regarding the importance of having a woman in the house. Argemiro is clearly depicted as believing his home to be restored by Alice, who brings about the return of life and happiness to his dwelling.

However happy he may be, Argemiro’s confession indicates an even greater threat than that perceived by the Baroness or his friends. They gossip about the possibility of immoral goings-on, but never imagine that Argemiro will defy social convention by marrying the governess. Understanding the implications of Argemiro’s feelings, his friend Adolfo advises him, without hesitation, to dismiss the governess or to abandon any romantic notions he has about her and treat her as others treat a governess. He remarks, “Parece-me que nos temos ocupado demais com uma criatura que talvez não mereça tanto . . .” (111). Adolfo understands that Argemiro cannot marry Alice, because Adolfo, speaking for society’s mores, cannot concede that Alice, despite her intelligence, honesty, or morality, can be more than a governess. He sees her as functioning in a separate social realm and cannot imagine that she belongs anywhere other than in her own class. He advises Argemiro to abandon his romantic notions, because society will not accept the future he imagines. He is unable to convince Argemiro, however, and Alice continues in his employment.
The Baroness, increasingly agitated as Argemiro becomes happier, insists on living with him. She seeks to remind him of her daughter and of her own position in his life, as well as in Maria da Glória’s upbringing. As she moves in, she encounters Alice, who speaks, for the second time in the novel, offering to lead the Baroness to her room. The Baroness interrupts, “Não é preciso . . . Eu sei o caminho; Glória! Vem tu comigo” (147). The Baroness wishes to reassert her control over Maria da Glória’s life, from the first moment she enters Argemiro’s home, and also attempts to put Alice in her place. The Baroness, having lost her previous power, resorts to petty maneuvers and condescending speech to restore her control. As Xavier notes in her introduction, “As manobras empregadas pela Baronesa não só a tornam mais vulnerável como anulam sua antiga dignidade; no afã de não perder o prestígio, ela causa pena e repulsa ao mesmo tempo” (V).

As the Baroness enters the hallway, dragging Maria da Glória with her, “Alice sorriu. Certamente a vida é às vezes bem amarga e dura de ganhar! . . . Que deveria ela esperar? . . . Fosse o que fosse esperaria até o fim” (147, emphasis added). The omniscient narrator has already entered the minds of Argemiro, Assunção, the Baroness, and other major and minor characters; this is the first time that Alice’s own thoughts are revealed. These reflections do not disclose much about Alice’s intentions, however, as they are ambiguous: Alice may be reasoning that she must be patient with the Baroness, expecting that things will eventually change, or she may be anticipating the termination of her employment by Argemiro, or she may be waiting patiently for the happy ending of her marriage to Argemiro. This possible double meaning offers no clear insight into Alice as a character, and Almeida allows the reader to decipher the intent of Alice’s
thoughts. What the reader does know about Alice, other than speculation, is that she has made no overt effort to seduce Argemiro and has abided loyally by his rules.

The Baroness, however, does not credit Alice for her hard work or her loyalty to Argemiro. Her anger grows into a rage and, finally, she unleashes her hostility. For the third time in the novel, Alice speaks and she does so forcefully. When the Baroness attempts to dismiss her, Alice refuses to leave. Her responses to the Baroness’ relentless anger are simply stated and respectful, but the Baroness becomes ever more enraged. When the Baroness insists that she will remove Alice by force, Alice responds, “Sou honesta. Estou de guarda a um lugar que me confiaram e que defenderei até a morte. Seu genro chega amanhã. Partirei depois dele ter entrado nesta casa. Antes, não, não, não e não!” (171). The argument leaves Alice trembling and feverish. The Baroness secures a victory.

In the end, however, her machinations achieve her no triumph: Argemiro, angry with the Baroness for discharging Alice, frees himself from his final promise to his wife. He understands that even a promise made sincerely, and made to appease a dying woman, cannot control one’s life. Two months later, he marries Alice. The Baroness contains herself but has aged, and finds herself consolable only by Assunção, who shares her grief over her forgotten daughter.

Notably, Alice never speaks of her love for Argemiro nor is her response to his declaration included in the story. Alice is interesting as a character primarily for her absence from the narrative. As Xavier notes, she is “narrada por todos sem voz própria” (VI). She is constantly a topic of conversation and of others’ speculation, but almost never speaks herself. Even when she does speak, she never shares personal details nor
does she necessarily share her true thoughts. Only in that one moment, as she reacts to
the Baroness’ arrival in the house, is Alice’s inner side briefly revealed.

But, again, we must reiterate that the novel is not truly about her, but about
others’ observations of her and conceptions of what her role is. The novel is entitled *A
intrusa*, not *A governanta*. This is a novel about bias: the Baroness’ certainty that her
position will be compromised by the dishonorable Alice, Assunção’s belief that the poor
Alice has immoral designs, and society’s assumption that Argemiro is engaged in an
illicit affair with the governess. Only Argemiro, favorably impressed by Alice’s
influence in his home and life, lacks the negative biases and ingrained beliefs of his
peers. Until the conclusion of the novel, however, Maria da Glória is the only character
to have real experiences and interactions with Alice. It is the conjecture and the ensuing
reactions of the characters, though not based on real knowledge, that comprise Almeida’s
narrative. Almeida prefers to focus her novel on the speculation of these members of
elite society rather than examining the daily realities of her poor governess.

While not focusing on Alice’s reality, Almeida does offer a moral tale by
providing her a happy ending. Almeida “aponta para a mulher um caminho eficiente para
a realização de suas ambições que, no âmbito restrito da época, se reduziam a ser mãe,
esposa e dona de casa” (VI). Almeida writes a tale of success found through the faithful
fulfillment of domestic tasks. Almeida does not offer a different path for women, but
does demonstrate the possibility of social ascent through hard work. Notably, Almeida
ends her novel with the happy wedding, not allowing for elite society's disapproval at the
end of the novel. The only factors that remain are the Alice-Argemiro family unit and the
Baroness, weeping alone for the loss of her “perfect” family. The reader is left to assume
that Alice and Argemiro have found an ideal ending, as the Baroness has retreated to her estate, the dissenters do not attend the wedding, and no one remains to object to their union.

As noted above, Alice never actually declares her love for Argemiro. The reader must assume that any woman in Alice’s situation (“sem recursos, mas com boa instrução”) would want to enter into elite Brazilian society (Xavier V). Certainly, after abolition and at the beginning of the new Republic, new opportunities arose for the middle and lower-middle classes. “O trabalho [passou] a ser o caminho trilhado pelas classes emergentes na busca de um lugar ao sol” (V).

The country itself provided the perfect example of social betterment in the modernization of Rio de Janeiro. The improvement of public health and communications made life in the new modern Brazil was much more pleasant than in the old Brazil. A intrusa depicts both the potential of this new Brazil, although Argemiro certainly is a character ahead of his time, and the worst prejudices of the ignorant elite. While Almeida presents her reader with the possibilities of a better, more socially just Brazil, she constructs her story on flawed premises. Her assumption that members of the lesser class would invariably want to ascend (she never develops any reason for Alice to love Argemiro; the point is simply presumed) and her assumption that women’s path to success lay in the domestic realm (never does she offer another possibility for Alice other than to work for a wealthy man or to rise to be the wife of a wealthy man) attests to her elite status and her traditional values.

Almeida reveals herself to be progressive in her definition of the elite family, now amended to include those from the lesser classes whose hard work earns them higher
status in Brazilian society. However, she offers the capable, educated, professional Alice a traditional, though unusual for its mixed-class union, solution: marriage. For all of the turmoil caused by Alice’s entrance into Argemiro’s home, and the reordering of his familial alliances and power structure, Alice emerges merely as an example of the merits of hard work. She remains, until the end of the novel, an object rather than the subject of the novel. However, one cannot deny Almeida’s criticism of the traditional elite, represented by the Baroness, nor her open-mindedness regarding the re-ordering of Brazilian society. Wilson Martins, in writing about A intrusa, remarks, “é [Almeida] um dos nossos romancistas do passado a exigir urgente releitura e reavaliação” (5: 384). While contemporary feminist scholars may criticize Almeida’s vision of women’s roles, careful reevaluation of the texts also reveals the more progressive stances she embraced in terms of the new order of her society and the future she envisioned for it.

**Correio da roça: Resurrection of a Family**

Unlike Alice’s favorable ascension via marriage, the heroine of Correio da roça, finds a financially independent, comfortable life built upon her own aptitude and labor. Maria, feeling disempowered after her husband’s death and her exile to a remote family estate, revitalizes her life and her farm through hard work and education. The prosperous state of Remanso at the end of the novel, after this elite family has taken an interest in its productivity and beautification, provides a striking contrast to the dilapidated estate at which the newly widowed Maria arrives. In addition to the tangible improvements the women bring about on the farm, their spirits have been nourished by the success of their labors. In Correio da roça, Almeida offers another thesis novel, this time about the transformative power of both the scholarly interest and the concrete efforts of the higher
classes in achieving national prosperity and in assuring the well-being of their own minds and hearts.

In order to provide Maria with a happy ending of her own creation, however, Almeida begins her story with an adversity that causes her to start anew. As the novel opens, Maria writes to Fernanda, a friend in Rio de Janeiro, about her disgrace. She has been exiled to the melancholic farm Remanso after her husband’s death and the arrival of his creditors. Unlike the national events (abolition of slavery and the economic downturns endemic of the Encilhamento) that caused Medeiros’ despondency in A família Medeiros or Francisco Theodoro’s downfall in A falência, Maria’s misfortune is caused by a highly personal event; the misfortune of her husband’s death, exacerbated by large debts which must be paid, leaves her with few recourses. This novel begins at virtually the same point where A falência ended, with Camilla moving to a smaller home and forced to work. One might even see Correio da roça as an alternative progression of Camilla’s story.

Maria, disheartened at her current state of affairs, forlornly writes to Fernanda about Remanso and about her concern that her daughters, “[ornadas] para brilhar na sociedade,” with French and musical training, will waste their lives in the country (30). Their lives are empty and dull. Maria proclaims, “Não fazer nada é a melhor maneira de sentir a gente envelhecer, morrer!” (31). The novel begins with a family in turmoil, with a woman expressing, via a letter to a close friend, that she and her four daughters are unable to imagine continuing their lives in their current situation, poor and exiled.
Fernanda, in her response, immediately asserts that life in the country can be very productive, advises Maria to plant potatoes, and affirms her idealization of Brazil’s agricultural destiny. She admonishes Maria:

acredita que o campo brasileiro será eternamente triste, se a mulher educada que o habita não se interessar pela sua fartura, a sua poesia, dando ao pessoal inculto que a rodeia exemplos de carinho, de atividade, de amor à natureza, levando-o assim na esteira da sua inteligência para um futuro melhor.” (33)

From the outset, then, Almeida establishes the principal differences between Maria and Fernanda: Maria, forced to live in the country, finds it disagreeable because of her Europeanized education and refined lifestyle, and Fernanda, living comfortably in the city, continually expounds the virtues of farm life, the long-held conviction of its importance to the future of Brazil, and women’s consequential roles in this prosperous future.

At first, Maria reacts rather negatively to Fernanda’s suggestions, especially to the idea that she plant potatoes. She describes her daughters’ reaction to Fernanda’s letter:

Talvez se risses se pudesses imaginar a expressão de desapontamento que se lhes pintava no rosto ao ouvirem as tuas frases incitando-as ao papel, perdoa-me que te diga, quase ridículo, de plantarem batatas e criarem galinhas, como se fossem velhas aldeãs analfabetas e grosseiras. (37)

Maria laments the lack of music, poetry, and sophistication in her new surroundings. She pleads with Fernanda to help arrange good marriages for her daughters. She refuses to raise herself above her current circumstances, convinced that her daughters will be happy only if able to return to their city life.

Fernanda, however, is relentless.

Crê, entretanto, na minha palavra: tuas filhas teriam menos necessidade de instrução se vivessem de valsa em valsa nos salões da nossa capital, do
She determines that the girls’ education will serve them well, because they can read about and implement new methods for instructing the farmworkers (colonos) and for improving the productivity of the farm. In addition to her advice, Fernanda takes decisive action and makes a contribution to Maria’s new life. Because Joaninha, Maria’s sixteen year-old daughter, has shown an interest in her advice, Fernanda sends her twelve orange trees to begin cultivating. With this small offering begins the transformation of the farm and of Maria’s life. Joaninha begins to work in the garden and to enjoy it; her fourteen year-old sister Clara, jealous of her gift from Fernanda, also wants to help. Notably, the first inclination towards adaptation arises from one of Maria’s younger daughters and not from Maria herself.

Once the two youngest girls begin to transform their lives, and as their work begins to make visible improvements on Remanso, Maria begins to take Fernanda’s advice seriously. Maria arranges to repair the farm roads, preparing them for automobile traffic. They raise animals, diversifying the farm’s output. They cultivate flowers, working to beautify the farm they so abhorred when they arrived. The girls begin to teach the workers, with the two oldest daughters, twenty year-old Cecília and eighteen year-old Cordélia, finding their calling as educators. Maria remarks that, little by little, she has come to enjoy life on Remanso. She begins to echo Fernanda’s familiar refrains, professing a strong confidence in Brazil’s productive possibilities,

Palpita-me que se em todas as fazendas houvesse alguém com a mesma coragem e o mesmo entusiasmo que minhas filhas estão revelando agora, o Brasil dentro de poucos anos deixaria de ser um país de analfabetos e tornaria bem seus os filhos dos colonos estrangeiros e estrangeiros eles também. (59)
Maria’s change of heart is slower than that of her daughters, however, and she still complains of the solitude of the quiet nights on the farm.

Fernanda, throughout her letters, bemoans city life and attempts to convince Maria that life among the elite is not as perfect as she remembers it. From the outset, she refuses to send Parisian magazines to Maria and the girls, claiming disinterest in the banalities of foreign lands, declines to share recent gossip despite Maria’s direct request for scandalous news, and generally degrades city life to a superficial monotony. She writes, “na cidade é preciso fingir, fingir a todos os momentos, dentro de casa como na rua, de dia como de noite. É a exigência que faz de nós a sociedade, que incorre em todas as faltas, mas não perdoa nenhuma . . . ” (68-69). The dialectic of the narrative is diversified some, with Almeida expanding beyond her exaltation of rural life to a harsh criticism of the city. While Almeida has hinted at the scandals and triviality of cosmopolitan carioca life in her other novels, with the rumors surrounding Argemiro and Alice in A intrusa and the secretive chatter encircling Camilla and Gervásio in A falência, this is the first novel in which she writes of the disheartening effects of life in elite society. Fernanda’s sullenness about her life stands in direct contrast to her enthusiasm regarding the possibilities for Maria’s farm and future. Notably, however, Fernanda never leaves the city, neither to live in the country nor to visit Maria, despite repeated promises to do so. Whereas Maria, although dejected at the beginning, has sought to make positive changes in her life, Fernanda, the constant source of encouragement for explicit action, remains resigned to her lot in life. She complains of “pequenas intrigas e grandes maldades, que presentemente nos sufoca na capital” (151). Her only source of
true happiness seems to be in her involvement with Maria’s progress on the farm. She continues to advise Maria and her daughters, via individual letters to each of them.

With the epistolary form, Almeida is able to express the intimate thoughts of her characters without the use of an omniscient narrator. A present-day critic speculates on the genesis of this choice:

Escritora, só se aceitava mesmo a que escrevia diários íntimos, dentro de seu quarto, escondida dentro da casa. Talvez seja este o motivo por que encontramos, na literatura feminina, sempre uma atmosfera de interiorização, intimista mesmo: uma forma de escrever voltada para dentro. (Paixão, Introduction, Correio 10)

In this novel, Almeida presents two women, hidden in their own homes, but writing to one another with an intimacy, a familiar honesty, in an exchange of very personal thoughts and ideas. The epistolary novel has been a popular form of expression “exatamente no período em que grandes transformações sociais e políticas estão acontecendo,” conditions that were present throughout Almeida’s career (14).

Fernanda’s candor in expressing her dislike of carioca life may at first seem startling, for the criticism is far more direct than anything in Almeida’s earlier novels, but confirms the power of the epistolary novel to explore intimate thoughts. Because of the closeness shared by Maria and Fernanda, Almeida is able to write with a critical honesty not seen in her other novels but certainly present in the dialogues of Eles e elas. In these more restricted settings, Almeida launches her most passionate arguments; in Eles e elas she clearly portrays the oppressive nature of gender relations and in Correio da roça she launches a vision for the future prosperity of Brazil.

Almeida provides proof of the importance of her vision. The first sign of real success on the farm, more profound than the brief references to increased happiness,
comes in the form of an engagement. Maria writes that Cecília, her oldest daughter, is engaged to a young neighbor, Silvino Mendes, with whom they have been working to build connector roads to municipal roadways. Having witnessed Cecília treating an injured student, Silvino was enamored by her actions even more than by her personality. As a declaration of his feelings for her, “esse senhor construiu e reconstruiu as estradas de um modo quase luxuoso” (80). The great happiness caused by this engagement has transformed Maria’s home: “A nossa casa já não parece a mesma: está agora sempre cheia de música e de cantos, influência do amor e do trabalho – essas duas fontes de perene beleza e de felicidade suprema” (81). Truly, Cecília’s engagement has eased Maria’s primary fears; having found a suitable partner for her daughter, she now fully embraces life on the farm and realizes that her daughters need not sacrifice happy futures (as wives) because of their locale.

Once Cecília is engaged, the family’s successes accelerate. They concern themselves with potable water for the colonos, they open a hospital, and they witness a veritable resurrection of the land. As a result of Maria’s achievements, Fernanda becomes more philosophical about humankind’s connection to the land. Rather than discussing poetry and art with her carioca friends, she seeks out agricultural experts and discusses ways to encourage growth in lettuce and coffee trees. She feels herself a partner in this transition to the new Brazil with its more progressive agricultural destiny.

Maria also credits Fernanda for her successes. She remembers the dilapidated Remanso of her arrival and admits,

O meu despontamento foi tão grande, que me deu vontade de fugir . . . A transformação destas terras e destes hábitos parecia-me tarefa superior às minhas forças; foi então que desabafei contigo e que a tua palavra clara e
amiga respondeu com afirmações às minhas dúvidas, com energia aos meus desfalecimentos. (97)

She admits how scandalized they were upon receiving Fernanda’s first letter, but admits that Fernanda’s total faith in her ideals came to be their salvation. Maria, at first so despondent about her daughters’ futures, now writes “estou convencida de que não é na pasmaceira dos colégios que se formam almas. Os ideais precisam de terreno amplo e livre em que se debatem e possam criar raízes. Este do campo é maravilhoso para isso” (111). With these statements, we see the total transformation of Maria: she has moved from rejection of the notion of finding happiness on the farm, to recognition that her daughters will have access to prosperous (married) futures, to embracing the good qualities of rural life and stating her preference for that life. She feels that, through their experience on Remanso, she has transmitted to her daughters the consciousness that if she has taste, education, and energy, a woman’s surroundings will be transformed by these qualities and will produce great benefits/profits for all concerned (111). These statements emanate from a very different woman than the one who wrote the first dejected letter.

As the novel closes, Maria writes that she will visit Rio to buy wedding accoutrements for Cordélia, newly engaged to a young engineer who assisted in the attainment of potable water. “Queres saber uma coisa engraçada? Agora ninguém quer acompanhar-me à capital! . . . Compara esta carta à primeira que te escrevi e vê de que milagres é capaz o trabalho!” (163). Thus ends Correio da roça, with a firm testament to the restorative power of hard work and the necessary dedication of educated women to the construction of a better Brazil.
Wilson Martins, who has given a reasonable analysis of Almeida’s novels on the whole, succinctly criticizes Correio da roça for the very sentiments that produce Maria’s moralistic final letter.

Com Correio da roça, Júlia Lopes de Almeida escreveu uma falsa novela epistolar, dissimulando um texto de propaganda da agricultura que preconiza a volta à terra e celebra os milagres proporcionados pelas atividades agrícolas; isso entrava na linha das suas obras ‘patrióticas’ ou pedagógicas. (531)

Many examples of Almeida’s propaganda, as Martins refers to it, can be extracted from the text of this thesis novel. In addition to those used for our discussion, above, the following statements are quite clear in their intention:

Enquanto no Brasil toda a gente pensar como tu, isto é, que o lavrador não precisa de inteligência nem de educação, o nosso campo servirá apenas de fonte de riquezas – para os outros. (43)

Para todas as agonias e desfalecimentos morais há um único remédio: - o trabalho. (62)

A terra brasileira não nega a quem a ame o que se lhe pedir. (118)

Se houvesse muitas brasileiras assim empenhadas em elevar o nível material, moral e intelectual do país, o Brasil não seria todo ele em poucos anos um verdadeiro paraíso? (132)

Almeida embraces Positivistic ideals regarding the development of Brazil: if the education of the elite intellectuals were to turn to agricultural problems, Brazil would clearly be able to profit from the land. She turns this ideal into a practical lesson with Maria and her family. While she is sincere in her intention, Almeida’s notions reflect Romantic mythology regarding the utopian quality of nature, as nature is not so easily perfected as she supposes.

In addition to her assumptions regarding Brazil’s agricultural possibilities, Almeida presumes that women’s involvement is central to this new avenue of
development. In *A intrusa*, Almeida showed how a woman’s hard work could gain her a favorable marriage. While marriage is certainly a concern in *Correio*, Maria’s daughters are merely secondary characters to Maria and the transformation of her values. Almeida offers us a heroine who has already fulfilled her duty to society by marrying. Now, as a widow, she can remain financially independent and can be credited with her own successes. She works for her own fulfillment and for the betterment of society, not in the hopes of finding an agreeable marriage. Almeida has moved to the next level: not only must woman accept changes in society’s structure, as the Baroness was forced to do, but she must move forward as a bearer of change. Life in the salons and the study of fashionable French novels do not offer the solution to Brazil’s economic or social ills. The elite, like Fernanda and Maria, must be willing to form part of the solution to Brazil’s problems, illustrated so clearly on neglected farms populated by uneducated workers. The issues faced on the farm become central to the novel and, as Almeida indicates repeatedly in the novel, central to the development of Brazil. Maria, in working with her family for the betterment of Remanso, demonstrates the crucial role entire families must play in resurrecting the land. If the reader has any questions of Almeida’s intentions, one need only consider that, at the end of the novel, the family renames their subsidiary farm, Tapera, to reflect the beautiful, productive changes they have made: they christen the property Ressurreição.

**(Im)Morality in *A Silveirinha***

The theme of resurrection not only permeates the narrative of *Correio da roça*, but also finds expression in the pervasive religious motif of *A Silveirinha (Crônica de um verão)*. It is the perceived religious redemption of Silveirinha’s husband, Jordão, that
resurrects her marriage and brings closure to the marital (family) upheaval of the novel. *A Silveirinha* is a novel about extremes: excessive religious devotion and its subsequent intolerance versus exceedingly luxurious lifestyles leading to bouts of immoral behavior. In the end, all are redeemed, the moral and the immoral alike, and all ends well. The ending, however, belies the serious criticism aimed at the excesses of the *carioca* elite. In *A Silveirinha*, Almeida illustrates her peers at their worst, furnishing Silveirinha with a happy ending only through the pragmatic actions of Silveirinha’s husband, himself exemplifying neither the saint nor the sinner. While undoubtedly the Almeidian novel most descriptive of religious experience and influence, *A Silveirinha* does not offer a clear moral tale like those of *A viúva Simões*, *A intrusa*, or *Correio da roça*. Instead, she offers acerbic criticism of her surrounding society and suggests a possible middle road for reconciliation of that society.

At first glance, *A Silveirinha* may be dismissed, because of its possible characterization as a *divertido folhetim*, a type of harlequin romance popular with contemporary audiences, especially women (Meyer 308). The *divertido folhetim* was marked by suspense, seduction, revelation—all attributes of good melodrama. For this reason, the *divertido folhetim* can be considered the forerunner to the modern-day *novela*, or soap-opera and, as such, an inferior art to the serious *folhetins* of the era (Meyer 310).

A likely indication of *A Silveirinha*’s dismissal as inferior literature is its absence from scholarly articles on Almeida’s *oeuvre*. Wilson Martins, generally amenable to Almeida’s work, fails even to list *A Silveirinha* in the year it was published. No contemporary scholars, other than Sylvia Paixão in the 1997 introduction, have written on the novel. *A Silveirinha*, however, clearly moves beyond the limited horizons of the
divertido folhetim and continues Almeida’s discussion of troubled familial relationships in elite society. While depicting the exterior elegance and absorbing drama of elite society, Almeida subtly alludes to the many blemishes of the fashionable lifestyle, exposing flaws to the discerning reader. Her portrait of daily life is thoughtful and nuanced as is her consideration of marital tensions, consistent with the general theme of family upheaval present in each of the seven books included in this thesis.

A Silveirinha opens with a scene description: “Petrópolis. Noite de festa em casa do banqueiro Korsakoff” (19). The first pages are filled with guest conversation; they flirt, gossip, and jest, switching frequently from Portuguese to French. Almeida leaves no question as to the social standing of her characters. She recreates the center of the elite sphere: the highly fashionable, exclusive parties of the chic summer vacation spot. The first few pages are filled with trivial chitchat, however, and lack any description of the stylish surroundings or elegant attire of the attendees.

The gossip turns to the young, devout Silveirinha and her fiancé Jordão, an attractive man in his early thirties. One of the guests, Roberto, describes Jordão as “um médico estudioso, e livre-pensador,” to which the Sra. Condessa counters, “Já me disseram. Contaram-me até que, por saber disso, a Silveirinha, ao ser chamada pelo pai à sala para responder ao pedido do noivo, se apresentou com todas as insígnias religiosas que pôde arranjar na ocasião: fita ao pescoço, de Filha de Maria; no peito todas as medalhas de santos e santas da corte celeste; e, pendente das mãos, um grande rosário de contas grossas como araças. (22-23)

This first description of Jordão and Silveirinha captures their essential characteristics: he is a free-thinking, non-religious man and she embodies extreme and intolerant religious devotion. Because Jordão does not accurately reflect Silveirinha’s zeal, she considers him to be an atheist. Almeida’s inclusion of this particular anecdote at this juncture,
amidst breezy party banter, is significant for the contrast it suggests between the trivial concerns of elite society and the solemnity of Silveirinha’s beliefs. The Condessa predicts that Silveirinha will convert Jordão, “Verá o que vai acontecer ao [marido]. Olhe, o duelo começou mesmo antes do casamento” (23). With this simple statement, the Condessa foresees the marital tensions caused by Silveirinha’s convictions.

The purity of Silveirinha’s beliefs is inconsistent with the questionable model of her confessor, padre Pierre, however. In Pierre’s first appearance in the narrative, as regarded by one of his parishioners, he is revealed to be an ambiguous character:

D. Clara não podia suportar o padre Pierre, com o seu latim afrancesado, as suas unhas esmaltadas, os seus termos a escorrer doçura, como bombons de licor. Desconfiava até que ele usasse sachets de Coeur de Jeannette em baixo do solidéu e que escovasse as suas batinas com a água de Colônia Russa; oferecida talvez pela Korsakoff. (40-41)

This description of the dandified Pierre attests to considerable extravagance on the part of a priest and suggests a general decadence within the Catholic Church. Paixão, in her introduction, describes him as “um jovem francês sedutor e vaidoso, embora representante de Cristo” (10). The fact that he is Silveirinha’s chosen confessor, though she is blind to his dubious moral well-being, adds another dimension to the strains on her marriage.

Silveirinha speaks with Pierre every day, detailing the goings-on in her new home and seeking his constant advice. The priest’s guidance underscores her religious zeal as he urges her to be persistent in her mission to convert Jordão and bolsters her confidence in her mission when she doubts herself. Their conversations are passionate, but never romantic. However, her frequent visits with him quickly attract the attention of the gossips, “O ideal da Silveirinha é nobre e justo; mas esses encontros todos os dias, com o
padre Pierre aqui, ali, acolá, não poderão ser interpretados com malignidade pela gente ociosa e que não está dentro do segredo?” (132). While the speaker understands that Silveirinha is seeking advice on how to convert her husband, she also knows that Silveirinha’s behavior will cause rumors among her peers.

More important than the perception of her friends, Silveirinha’s relationship with Pierre, in addition to her absolute intolerance of Jordão’s religious stance, causes Jordão to attempt to assert control over his wife. When Silveirinha makes the largest donation toward Pierre’s birthday gift, a charitable donation in his name, despite Jordão’s public dislike of the priest, Jordão becomes incensed.

Confronting Silveirinha, Jordão, arguing that his authority as the male/husband should never be undermined, proclaims that a married woman has no right to oppose her husband in public and he forbids her from ever entering into another church. Never has he asked her to abandon her religion, but his fury at being publicly humiliated is such that he has reach the limits of his, thus far considerable, tolerance. Finally, Jordão reminds her “agora que és minha mulher, para a vida e para a morte, tens de ceder à minha vontade, porque a minha vontade é a mais forte e é a mais justa” (145).

Silveirinha’s reaction to Jordão’s demands are as extreme as his attempts to subject her to his rules. She retorts, “a porta é livre, vai procurar outra mulher que te entenda” (145). She confesses that she agreed to be his wife because she wanted to save him and not because she loved him. Silveirinha’s declaration that she does not love him
only confirms what Jordão has feared all along; because of her insistence upon his
conversion and the many arguments it has caused, the pair has never established a happy
or loving marriage. Jordão, however, loves Silveirinha, but this recent act of betrayal, of
her grand donation to Pierre’s birthday, has enraged him. The fight ends horribly, with
Jordão threatening to leave her and with her reiterating that he may go whenever he
chooses to do so. “Estavam ambos lívidos, trêmulos, numa tremenda agitação de nervos.
As suas palavras cruzavam-se rapidamente, como tiros de guerra” (145). Clearly,
Silveirinha’s zealous religiosity, which her husband has tolerated for so long, has caused
a major rupture in her marriage.

Only after this mighty battle does the narrator enter into Silverinha’s troubled
thoughts. She does love her husband, but considers this love to be the Devil’s curse. She
truly fears that her marriage will lead her into hell, as she loves the unbelieving Jordão,
“apesar de tudo, às vezes com um desejo torpe, vergonhoso, animal” (155). For Jordão,
Silveirinha’s extreme convictions, stubbornly adhered to even when they contradict his
desires, are the font of all problems in the marriage. For Silveirinha, however, her
adamant insistence that he convert is rooted in a deeper dilemma: she fears that her desire
for him will cause her to stray from the correct path. The deeply religious Silveirinha
fears the depth of her feeling for Jordão. She is unsure how to process it so as to make it
acceptable, thus her belief that his full conversion will assure her of a moral victory. If
the atheist Jordão converts, she need not mistrust her feelings for him. After this
argument, believing the task too grand for her, she seeks out Pierre and expresses her
desire to enter a convent.
Pierre, about to leave Petrópolis permanently, coldly advises Silveirinha to seek forgiveness from her husband and to try to reconcile with him. Padre Pierre, a bit of a dandy, at times a wise confessor, at other times an ambiguous character, has played an influential role in Silveirinha’s life. Upon learning of his departure, Silveirinha blames him for her current situation: boosted by his constant advice and conviction, she believed herself capable of converting Jordão. Now, doubting her ability and her method, she is left upset, alone, abandoned. “A culpa fora dele, que a absorvera, a escravizara à sua influência, para a repelir depois sem comiseração” (163). Still, despite her strong feelings of betrayal, Silveirinha returns to her home and follows his advice: she announces to Jordão that she will, henceforth, respect his ideas. Silveirinha and Jordão return to Rio, where their reconciliation seems complete. Notably, the rapprochement happens only with the departure of the enigmatic Pierre, but is carried out at his insistence. Pierre continues to be an ambivalent character, both fueling Silveirinha’s marital distress and, in the end, ameliorating it.

The honeymoon period of mutual acceptance and tolerance does not last, however, as the marriage is put in jeopardy by another antagonist: in performing an autopsy, Jordão contracts a deadly illness because he had been pricked, two days earlier, by Silveirinha’s pin. It is the lingering effects of this misfortune that set up the true and final reconciliation between Silveirinha and her husband, however. While relations had improved immensely after Pierre’s departure, Silveirinha continued to worry about Jordão’s conversion. Without Pierre as her guide, she feared that she would stray in her path and that Jordão would be condemned to hell. Several chapters depict her agitation over this matter. Jordão’s illness only exacerbates Silveirinha’s fears and, of course,
reinforces her feelings of guilt. Whereas before she had felt guilty for her inability to change his ways, she now feels responsible for his grave illness and redoubles her efforts to save him, praying diligently for his salvation.

She deems her efforts rewarded when she surprises Jordão, who has survived his ordeal, with a rosary. He has seen it on the night table, lifts it because he remembers that she carried it on their engagement night, and counts out the beads, moving his lips as he counts each one.

A Silveirinha surpreendeu-o assim, e foi tal a sua comoção, julgando que o marido estivesse a rezar, que se quedou à distância, num silêncio estupefeito, até que ele concluísse as suas rezas . . . Seria possível que a graça do Senhor tivesse baixado a iluminar aquele espírito nessa hora de renascimento e de esperança? (277)

It is not Silveirinha’s belief in her husband’s spiritual rebirth that reconciles her marriage however. The marriage is saved by Jordão’s astute decision, upon hearing of Silveirinha’s promise of tremendous sacrifice for the restoration of his health, to allow her to believe that God was responsible for his recovery and that her faith has transformed him. In essence, Jordão is not lying to Silveirinha; he sees her dedication to his recovery, at high personal cost, as the revelation of her depth of feeling for him.

He agrees to wear a religious medal, seeing it as a testament of Silveirinha’s love. Jordão admits to a friend that he has made certain sacrifices to ensure marital contentment: “Limitar-me-ei a usar a sua santinha de ouro ao pescoço e a não discutir religião a seu lado. Ela praticará como entender . . . Nunca imaginei que isso se pudesse dar . . . mas é preciso que eu sacrifique as minhas expansões à sua . . . à nossa felicidade . . .” (304). He has stopped trying to control Silveirinha’s religiosity, an action he only took in a moment of hurt pride when she acted against his wishes in her donation for
Pierre’s birthday. Now confident of her love for him, he is willing to compromise the expression of his beliefs, although this quotation makes it apparent that he has not compromised his convictions themselves. In making Jordão the bearer of positive change in the relationship, Almeida seems to indicate that his path is the correct one. She does not allow the obsessed Silveirinha a moral victory, opting instead for a successful negotiation on Jordão’s part.

The marital drama of A Silveirinha plays against a backdrop of luxurious excess, which makes Silveirinha’s extreme piety even more conspicuous. The rather harmless gossip in the first scene merely foreshadows the kinds of scandalous behavior that takes place during the story. The carioca elite is portrayed, from the first scene, to be concerned only with trivialities. One especially pertinent example of their lack of depth is the women’s attendance of “uma conferência sobre ‘O Flirt,’ no Palácio de Cristal” (57).

The elite frequently speak in French, an indication of their education and their stature, but do so only to speak of unimportant things. They use French to compliment one another, to seem clever, to convey snobbery, and to flirt. The women recite in French at the salons, but the men, preferring to smoke, express their extreme distaste when forced to hear the poetry. The acquisition of French, then, does not correspond to a distinct interest in a rich cultural heritage, but reflects a societal expectation. Almeida uses the French dialogues to great irony: “a reprodução de diálogos em francês mostra a importância da cultura européia então dominante, trazendo ao ambiente dos salões o ar de sofisticação desejado, sem que a autora reprima uma certa ironia crítica, facilmente perceptível pelo leitor nem sempre desatento” (Paixão 13). The notable fact is that the
1997 edition of *A Silveirinha* includes translations of the French phrases, but the original novel did not: “os leitores da época não necessitavam da respectiva tradução” (17). One wonders if her readers, obviously elite themselves in order to understand her use of the French language, understood her sense of irony in using it to such effect.

The use of French is only a minor point in considering the immoral behavior of the bored elite in Petrópolis, however. Even by Silveirinha’s standards, the French gossip would have seemed a minor vice in comparison to the scandals. As Silveirinha’s story unfolds, so does an affair between two of Silveirinha’s peers, Xaviera and Ludgero. The married Xaviera seduces the young man out of jealousy of her good friend, with whom she believes Ludgero is having an affair. She seeks to steal him away. Ludgero, who is innocent of the liaison, allows himself to be seduced by Xaviera because he believes he can use this association to advance his career. The case is quite complicated, and does not end without humiliation, but, because of his careful manipulation of the affair, Ludgero is able to marry well and to succeed professionally. Xaviera, scandalized by Ludgero’s behavior, flees to Paris, because “afinal é lá que está o remédio para tudo” (257).

Almeida’s depiction of the elite is of a class caught in its own pettiness, of the educated few concerned only with their own elegance, and disinterested in the future of their nation because of their preoccupation with the the maintenance of their luxurious lives. The seriousness of Silveirinha’s marital difficulties stems from her unwavering belief system. The immoral behavior and ensuing threat to the stability of the other elite families, however, plays out as a cliché, a harlequin romance of great appeal to women readers but with seemingly little intrinsic value. Almeida does not show progressiveness
among the elite, other than in Jordão’s reasonable conduct, as she does in *A intrusa* and *Correio da roça*. Her portrait of extremes, in both Silveirinha’s religious zeal and the other characters’ wealthy boredom and disinterest, indicates a distance between the problems of the nation and those most able to address them. The family upheaval of this novel does not rise above itself to address the larger problems of Brazil, as each of the other novels, both early and late, did in their own manner. While Almeida points to the middle position as a reasonable solution to turmoil, she does not make the argument on a larger scale, preferring instead to focus solely on the private family domain. In addition to the novel’s melodramatic elements, it may be this lack of grand purpose that causes this novel to be slighted by literary scholars. However, the satiric portrait of the elite builds upon other negative images of this social class developed by Almeida in *A intrusa* (the Baroness) and *Correio da roça* (Fernanda’s critique of cosmopolitan city life). And, the focus on the difficulties of spousal relationships makes the novel appropriate to the discussion at hand.

### The Newly Defined Families of the Late Novels: Progress from Upheaval

In summary, the central characters of these novels are affected by societal expectations, but they are not beholden to them. In *A intrusa*, Argemiro, who defies social convention by marrying his Alice, finds a happy ending. In *Correio da roça*, Maria uses her new independence to take control of her family’s farm and becomes a symbol for the importance of women’s contribution to the future prosperity of Brazil. In *A Silveirinha*, Jordão, in the power position as patriarch, is able to compromise when faced with the possibility of losing his wife and adjusts to better suit her needs. These characters, unlike their predecessors in the early novels, are able to adapt to new
circumstances and even become instigators of change when their convictions precede social transformations.

As with her earlier novels, Almeida includes philosophical counterpoints to the beliefs of her primary characters. These oppositional characters are those who, unable to adapt to new social realities, provoke the family turmoil of the late novels. The Baroness of A intrusa fights bitterly against Argemiro’s dependence on a woman she perceives to be an intruder in her world. In the end, she loses and must accept the reality of a more socially mobile Brazil. In A Silveirinha, she faces the possibility of losing her husband because of her rigid, zealous religiosity. Her marriage is saved only by a misunderstanding and Jordão’s subsequent decision to acquiesce to her needs. It is interesting to note, however, that although the stubborn Silveirinha finds a happy ending, she does so only through the compromise of her husband and not because of her steadfast adherence to religious tradition. The reader familiar with Almeida’s earlier works can easily imagine a quite different ending, with the obstinate Silveirinha alone and bitter.

But none of the central characters in these novels find the tragic endings dominant in Almeida’s early novels. The period of national turmoil has passed and these later protagonists form part of Brazil’s prosperous future. Almeida’s progressive central characters – Argemiro, Maria, and Jordão – are able to forge positive change in their lives and homes and the happy endings bestowed to their families are the direct results of their sensible actions. These are the families who will construct the new Brazil, leaving national and family upheaval behind them as they forge ahead into a more favorable future. Certainly, the ideal may seem simplistic but this is, truly, the model that Almeida presents in these later novels.
CONCLUSION: AN ONGOING RECOVERY

The aim of this thesis has been to build upon the limited body of scholarship on Júlia Lopes de Almeida by developing an analysis of the theme of family upheaval in selected works of her prose fiction. Three groups of works reflect distinct stages in Almeida’s career: the early novels (1891-1901: A família Medeiros, A viúva Simões, and A falência); the sui generis collection Eles e elas (1910); and the late novels (1908-1914: A intrusa, Correio da roça, and A Silveirinha). These books are linked thematically to the historical period during Almeida wrote, and her exploration of her characters’ familial relationships and tensions is shaped by the prominent socio-economic challenges of her era. A comparative examination of these seven texts has revealed meaningful differences, associated with the career phase during which particular books were written and with Almeida’s approaches to the complexities and layers of family life.

Almeida creates a diverse cast of elite characters, with distinct philosophical positions, and places them in intimate family settings where they must coexist. The constant, unavoidable interactions of characters with strongly opposing viewpoints that cause the familial tensions structure these novels. A common feature of Almeida’s oeuvre, throughout the years, is her portrayal of the collision of traditional/conservative and progressive beliefs as the underlying cause of family turmoil. Medeiros, representing landed patriarchal authority in A família Medeiros, argues with Eva, who employs free black workers on her farm. In A viúva Simões, Sara, symbolizing adherence to traditional social customs, locks horns with her mother, Ernestina, whose disregard for
propriety threatens her status in society. The aristocratic Baroness in *A intrusa*, desperate to retain control over her family, opposes Argemiro in his unorthodox request to raise his daughter on his own; the hiring of Alice only exacerbates the unconventional nature of the situation, causing the Baroness to resort to manipulative, unbecoming attempts to reaffirm her power.

While the upheaval is caused by the clashing convictions of various family members, the characters central to the novels, and those who represent opposing beliefs, vary according to the period in which Almeida wrote the work. In the early novels, the primary characters are staunch traditionalists, reacting to the liberal beliefs espoused by Eva in *A família Medeiros* and Catharina in *A falência*. In the late novels, the protagonists (Argemiro, Maria and her daughters, and Jordão) are instigators of changes of which the conservative, closed-minded characters (the Baroness and Silveirinha) are resentful. The roles have been reversed and the progressive characters, who often played minor roles in the first novels, dominate the portrait of life in early twentieth-century elite Brazilian society, further illustrating the lack of adaptability of those mired in traditional structures and beliefs.

*Eles e elas*, partially for the difference in genre and partially for the difference in tone, provides a striking contrast to both the early and the late novels. In these monologues and dialogues, the voices of husbands speak for traditional patriarchal power, and marital (i.e. familial) tensions are created by their treatment of their wives as subordinates. Turmoil stems from the wives’ awareness of their low status within their families and their first, albeit mild, protests of that inferior position, whether declared overtly in the narratives or indirectly in the complaints of the narrating spouses. The
startlingly direct declarations of unhappiness made by the wives, in the privacy of monologues that reflect their innermost thoughts, do not conform to the mild manner with which they outwardly accept their husbands’ authority over their lives. *Eles e elas*, through the intimate tone of its compositions, is Almeida’s most open discussion of gender inequity and, as such, offers weighty material for consideration by those scholars who label Almeida as conservative. For this reason alone, *Eles e elas* presents itself as a fine book to be considered for republication as scholars reevaluate Almeida’s contribution as a woman writer.

The *resgate* of Almeida’s novels and the renewed and innovative scholarly activity, begun in 1987 and continuing today, are only the beginning. If the rescue and reassessment are to continue, serious scholars must undertake extensive examination of Almeida’s work, including her novels, short stories, plays, and even her etiquette manuals for women, and they must do so from multiple angles. While this thesis is but one small step, our examination of these seven books suggests the need for a thorough review of Almeida, not just as a woman writer, but as a talented author whose novels reflect the historical milieu in which she wrote them. What is clear, throughout the years, is that what the distinguished writer Júlia Lopes de Almeida did best was to portray the significant conflicts and turmoil of elite families as they both reacted to, and helped to address, large-scale, national transformations and internal class re-definitions.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Natalie Arsenault was born in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, and grew up in Massachusetts and in Florida. Natalie attended New College of the University of South Florida (Sarasota, Florida), the honors college of the State University System of Florida, and received a Bachelor of Arts in foreign languages in 1995. While an undergraduate, she received a scholarship to study in Florianópolis, Brazil, where she gained an appreciation for Brazilian literature. After college, Natalie worked for New College Admissions for four years before deciding to pursue her interest in Brazil in graduate school.

In 1999, Natalie entered the University of Florida to complete a Master of Arts in Latin American Studies. In late January 2001, she left Florida to accept a position as Outreach Coordinator at the Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. She completed her master’s thesis while living and working in Austin.
About Júlia Lopes de Almeida: The first Brazilian woman to lead what can legitimately be called a career as an author, Júlia Valentina de Silveira Lopes was born in Brazil on September 24, 1862, and died in May 30, 1934. Her contributions to literature and gender studies have been significant.

Influences:
- Machado de Assis
- Guy de Maupassant
- Jules Michelet
- Émile Zola

Julia Lopes de Almeida was a self-taught painter, known for her works that depict her childhood home in the Costa Chica region of Guerrero state. However, she wanted more in life and began her journey by going to Ometepec to work in a hotel called Casa Verde when she was only thirteen years old. In 1951, she moved to Acapulco, where she worked in a hotel kitchen. During this time, she did not attend school but rather taught herself to read and do basic math.