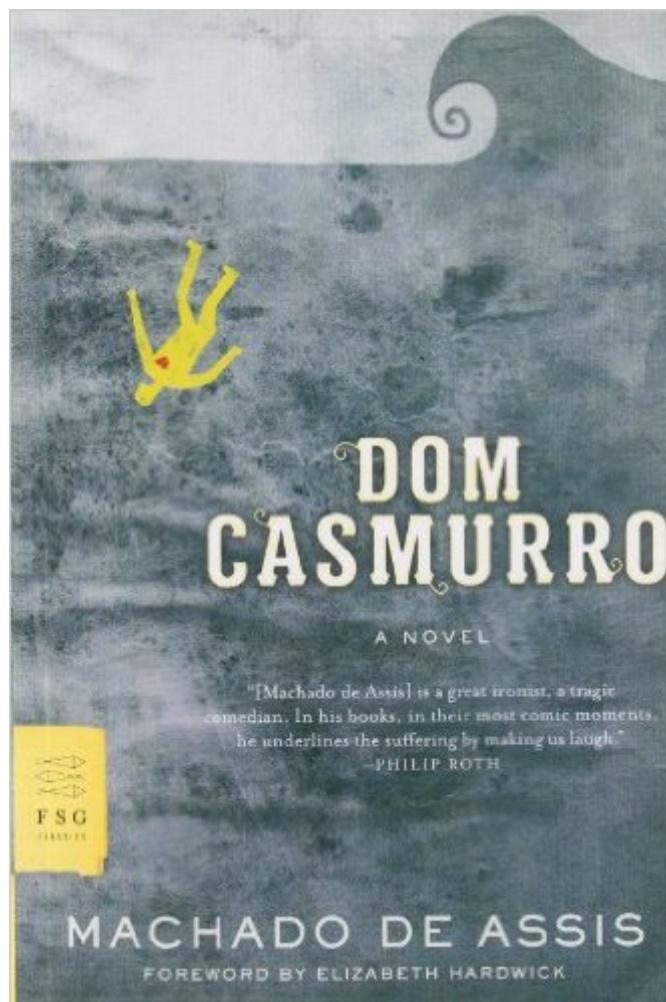


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Dom Casmurro: A Novel (FSG Classics)



Synopsis

Bento Santiago, the wildly unreliable narrator of *Dom Casmurro*, believes that he has been cuckolded—he suspects that his wife has cheated on him with his best friend and that her child is not his. Has Capitão, his love since childhood, really been unfaithful to him? Or is the evidence of her betrayal merely the product of a paranoid mind? First published in 1900, *Dom Casmurro*, widely considered Machado de Assis's greatest novel and a classic of Brazilian literature, is a brilliant retelling of the classic adultery tale—a sad and darkly comic novel about love and the corrosive power of jealousy.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

European students of literature usually concentrate on writers from their own continent, with occasional nods across the Atlantic to North America. Americans have a somewhat more respectful attitude to Europe, but that's all. Neither take the rest of the world all that seriously and that's a big mistake. Among the national literatures most consistently ignored, none has more to offer than Brazil's. Four writers stand out to my mind---J.M. Machado de Assis, Jorge Amado, Joaquim Guimaraes Rosa, and Euclides da Cunha---but there are many others. Of these four writers, three have written great books that reveal aspects of Brazilian history, society and culture in rich detail. The fourth, Machado de Assis, (1839-1908) the writer under review here, is much more a universal author. You will not learn very much about 19th century Brazil from his works. Of course, a little bit

of knowledge will stick to your brain---slaves, Emperor, eyes on European trends, tropical climate---but it's amazing how little atmosphere or description there is. Machado de Assis never wanted to be a realist; he is very far from writers like Balzac or Zola. DOM CASMURRO is divided into 148 chapters. Obviously in a book of 277 pages, each chapter cannot be very long. Machado de Assis uses his chapter titles as part of his work, sources of humor, direction, and irony. The novel is arranged as a memoir written by an embittered man in his sixties about the period of his life from roughly ages 15 to 30. When you begin reading, you think that the theme is "coming of age in Brazil" as the author describes his early romantic attachment to the girl next door and his struggle to avoid the seminary and a priestly future. His family members emerge as complex, interesting and somewhat amusing characters.

When a novelist writes from the perspective of an omniscient narrator, it at least creates the illusion that we're hearing a full and fair version of events. But it is a peculiarity of first person narrative that some of the very best and some of the very worst novels which use the technique leave us wondering what the story might sound like from the perspective of a different character. We all assume that Sam Spade and Phil Marlowe are reliable sources on the events they relate, but even if we trust Ishmael, don't we wonder what Ahab's version of the great novel Moby Dick might be ? And when it comes to a dreadful novel like Barbara Kingsolver's Poisonwood Bible, one of the most noticeable flaws of the novel is that the villain of the piece is unfairly vilified and we're left wishing he had a voice. Several authors have actually used this idea as a starting point, and in novels like Wide Sargasso Sea, Jack Maggs, and Wicked, have given us alternate versions of classic stories from the perspective of a different character (N.B., yes I'm aware that the source novels for these three are not all told in the first person). These derivative novels are not necessarily effective, Wicked is the only one I'd recommend, but they do reflect a general recognition that, as in real life, even in a fictional story, the narrative of a participant must be suspect, and that our reliance on that narrator may leave us with mistaken impressions. This concept resides deep within our culture: what, after all, is the New Testament but God's recognition that Man has his own side of the story ?

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