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The Mandarin(and other stories) (Dedalus European Classics)

Jose Maria Eca de Queiroz

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Eca de Queiroz (1845-1900) is considered to be Portugal’s greatest novelist and one of its finest prose writers. In The Mandarin he turns his satirical eye on the sin of avarice and asks the following question: In the depths of China there lives a mandarin who is richer than any king spoken of in fable or in history. You know nothing about him, not his name, his face or the silks that he wears. In order for you to inherit his limitless wealth, all you have to do is to ring the bell placed on a book by your side. In that remote corner of Mongolia, he will utter a single sigh. He will then be a corpse, and at your feet you will see gold beyond the dreams of avarice. Mortal reader, will you ring the bell?’ When Teodoro, our timid, lowly narrator, says 'Yes’, he finds that fabulous wealth brings with it unexpected problems. The three very different stories that complete the collection – 'The Idiosyncrasies of a Young Blonde Woman’, 'The Hanged Man’ and 'Jose Matas’ – are all tales of obsessive love, each told with Eca's irrepressible wit and originality. “A brilliant mischievous essay in fantasy chinoiserie, irreverently subverting the trope, created half a century earlier by Balzac in La Peau de chagrin, of the Oriental curse masquerading as a blessing. In the same Dedalus collection of Eca's short fiction lies a late gem,'Jose Matias', a love story told at a funeral by a Hegelian philosopher, in which the issue of the narrator's own relationship with reality adds a comically ambiguous layer to the tale." Jonathan Keates in The Times Literary Supplement

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