

Fernando Pessoa and the Russian world

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Keywords

Russian literature, Chekhov, Evreinov, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Gorky, Anarchism, Kropotkin, Communism, Lenin, Genius and madness.

Abstract

The work of Fernando Pessoa seems, at first sight, to pay scant attention to either the people or culture of the Slavic world. Moreover, when overt statements occur, they tend to be disparaging. But why should Pessoa, with his exceptional intellectual curiosity and a mindset naturally inclined towards comparisons and cosmopolitanism, consider that “of Russia it is not necessary to speak”? Some at least provisional answers to this question require a closer look at Pessoa’s genuine knowledge of and interest in the Russian world (and especially Russian literature and politics) through the examination of his poems and prose, but also through a consideration of his unrealized projects and the annotations and underlinings made in his hand in the books he possessed in his private library.

Palavras-chave

Literatura russa, Chekhov, Evreinov, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Gorky, Anarquismo, Kropotkin, Comunismo, Lénine, Génio e loucura.

Resumo

A obra de Fernando Pessoa parece prestar, à primeira vista, pouca atenção quer ao povo, quer à cultura do mundo eslavo. Adicionalmente, quando há declarações óbvias, estas tendem a ser depreciativas. Por que motivo Pessoa, com a sua curiosidade excepcionalmente intelectual e mentalidade naturalmente inclinada para comparações e cosmopolitismo, consideraria que “não é necessário falar da Rússia”? Pelo menos algumas das respostas provisórias a esta pergunta exigem um olhar mais atento ao conhecimento genuíno de Pessoa pelo mundo russo (e especialmente da literatura e política russas), através do exame dos seus poemas e da sua prosa, mas também através da consideração dos seus projetos não realizados e das anotações e trechos sublinhados feitos pela sua mão nos livros que tinha na sua biblioteca privada.

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A cursory glance at the work of the Portuguese writer Fernando Pessoa reveals little emphasis on either the people or culture of Russia, or the Slavic world more generally. What references he does make are rare, and often strike by their disparaging character. While Pessoa can be equally cutting in his judgments of other European nations—though his views are rendered inconsistent by the sometimes divergent voices of his heteronyms—his observations with respect to Russia seem to be uniform: Russia must be placed below both civilized and “uncivilized” nations (however vaguely conceived), because it possesses “no type of culture at all” (PESSOA, 1993: 296; BNP/E3, 55B-45^r). Pessoa variously observes that Russia comprises a “half savage people that has no claim to civilization,” that “in Russia, there is not even Russia yet” (PESSOA, 1993: 298; BNP/E3, 55B-43^r), and that along with Greece, Turkey, and the Balkan countries, Russia belongs to the *oriental* “civilizational group” of Europe, one “ainda informe e incapaz de produzir elementos civilizacionais” (PESSOA, 1980: 161; BNP/E3, 55I-29^v) [*still without form and incapable of producing civilizational elements*]. Russians, moreover, are easily governed, because they are like “gado russo, aqueles animais a que se chama o povo russo” (PESSOA, 1979a: 114; BNP/E3, 55-84^r) [*Russian cattle, those animals called the Russian people*], a “povo passivo e com hábitos de escravo” (PESSOA, 1979b: 352; BNP/E3, 92-7^r) [*passive people with slave habits*] or, as Pessoa says through his main character in *O Banqueiro anarquista*, a “povo de analfabetos e de místicos” (PESSOA, 2013a: 56) [*people of illiterates and mystics*]. Compounding his orthonym views, Pessoa invests certain of his heteronyms with comments still less generous. For his French heteronym, Jean Seul de Méluret, the Slavic race is odd and weak, which is why Germany, a higher culture in his view, “must conquer, or help to conquer some Slavic race”: “The oddest is the weakest. So the weakest goes to the wall” (PESSOA, 2006a: 66; BNP/E3, 50A¹-14^v). One of his main heteronyms, Álvaro de Campos, not to be outdone, speaks, in *Ultimatum*, of a “escravatura russa” (PESSOA, 2014a: 405) [*Russian slavery*] comparable to that of the Asian people.

Do these recurrent assertions, often expressed as obvious conclusions without evidence or reasoning, accurately reveal Pessoa’s thinking about the Slavic world? Are dismissive sentences such as “of Russia it is not necessary to speak” (PESSOA, 1993: 298; BNP/E3, 55B-43^r) to be taken at face value or viewed as jottings out of context? Why this negativity, apparently so unnuanced in regard to these cultures and peoples, something so out of character for this most thoughtful of authors? Could it perhaps be understood merely as relative ignorance of Russia? We know that, at the time, Portugal had limited firsthand knowledge of this faraway country, though this was beginning to change, thanks to the abundant notes and chronicles of three Portuguese intellectuals: the philosopher Jaime de Magalhães Lima (1859–1936), the geographer Manuel Ferreira Deusdado (1858–1918), and the ethnographer Zófimo Consiglieri Pedroso (1851–1910) (NAGOVITSINA: 2015: 19–57).

Each of them, for different reasons, had visited Russia and come back with the desire to introduce this exotic northern empire to Portugal.

Since Pessoa was himself a well-informed intellectual, it would be doing him an injustice to consider his above-cited opinions, despite their harshness, as a final judgment on the topic. Is it possible, in taking a closer look at his work, to discover perhaps more subtle, but at least more positive assessments of Russian culture? With this aim, through his notes, poems, prose and other writings, we examine below the question of Pessoa's genuine knowledge and interest in Russian literature and politics, the two domains of the greatest attraction to him in every culture.

1. Pessoa and Russian literature

Despite the newfound interest in Portugal with respect to Russian culture, Russian literature was still rarely translated into Portuguese by 1900. What were available were French translations of Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol, Turgenev, and other great nineteenth-century authors. Turgenev himself played a significant part in making such works accessible through his own "approximated" translations from Russian into French of numerous Russian authors, which were then reworked by French writers such as Paul Viardot, Prosper Mérimée or Gustave Flaubert. The *Roman russe* by Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé, a collection of articles of literary criticism on the most important Russian authors of the nineteenth century and published in Paris in 1886, met with success also in Portugal (we know that Magalhães Lima read the book before travelling to Russia). Nevertheless, for those unfamiliar with French, valuable information on Russian literature, as well as on the artistic and scientific life of Russia, was supplied in Portuguese via an earlier 1868 publication, *Quadros da Literatura, da Ciência e das Artes na Rússia*, by the erudite Russian musicologist Platon Vakcel (living in Madeira and in Lisbon) at the request of the Portuguese historian José Silvestre Ribeiro. According to the critic Elena Wolf, it was due to this book that:

Neste livro o leitor português que sabia quase nada da literatura russa, podia ver pela primeira vez os nomes de grandes poetas e prosadores como Lomonóssov e Derjávín, Púshkin e Lérmontov, de Karamzín, Gógol, Turguénev, Tolstoi, Dostoievski [...]. O livro despertou vivo interesse entre o público português que naquela época tinha um conhecimento muito vago da Rússia, da sua história e vida contemporânea.

(WOLF, 1988: 314)

[In this book the Portuguese reader, who knew almost nothing about Russian literature, could meet for the first time the names of great poets and prose writers like Lomonosov and Derzhavin, Pushkin and Lermontov, Karamzin, Gogol, Turgenev, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky (...). The book aroused lively interest among the Portuguese public who at that time had a very vague knowledge of Russia, its history and contemporary life.]¹

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, translations from Portuguese and French into English are those of the author of the article.

Despite these developments, prominent Portuguese writers of the time sometimes reacted with condescension towards this literature, which some perceived to be so different from that of the rest of Europe that they labeled it incomprehensible. Such was the case of the great poet Antero de Quental (1842–1891) who, after reading one of these “Russians,” whose name he did not bother to reveal, wrote in 1888 to his friend Oliveira Martins:

Li o Russo que me fez o efeito que sempre me tem feito um pouco que conheço dessa gente e é, proximamente, que são doidos e, o que é pior, doidos lúgubres. Não os entendo e acho neles um terrível desequilíbrio, um excesso de imaginação e sensibilidade, um nervosismo doentio, e ainda outra coisa que não sei definir e que me repele como tudo o que não consigo entender. Parece-me gente que fala sonhando. Não gosto disso.

(QUENTAL, 1989: 886)

[I read the Russian, and he had on me the effect that the little I know of these people always has on me, namely, that they are crazy and, what is worse, depressingly crazy. I don't understand them, and I find in them a terrible imbalance, an excess of imagination and sensitivity, a sick nervousness, and still something else that I can't define but that repels me, like everything I cannot comprehend. They look like people talking in dreams. I don't like that.]

For Quental, it appears, Russian literature was written by “enthusiasts,” “visionary,” “instinctive” and “sentimental” people, and betrays “chaotic thinking” (QUENTAL, 1989: 918).

Pessoa, as we know, had a real passion for, and vast knowledge of, literature in general, evidenced by his many observations not only on Portuguese writers, but those from abroad as well. But, as we observed above concerning his relationship to Slavic culture in general, he refers little to Slavic literature, and when some mention of Russian authors occurs, there is no commentary to speak of, but merely simple and conclusory allusions. This certainly does not imply that Pessoa had no interest in this literature. If we take a look at his private library, for example, we discover concrete information on Pessoa's first-hand reading of Russian literature. His library, in the state in which it was left at his death, contained a number of books by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Russian authors in Spanish, English and French translation: *Nochebuena* by Nicolas Gogol (GOGOL, 1922); *Plays: Uncle Vanya, Ivanoff, The Sea-Gull, The Swan Song* by Anton Chekhov (CHEKHOV, 1915); *The Theater of the Soul* by Nikolai Evreinov (EVREINOV, 1915); *Mémoires d'un seigneur russe, Scènes de la vie russe* and *Nouvelles scènes de la vie russe* by Ivan Turgenev (TURGENEV, 1912, 1910, 1913). Moreover, two works of criticism on Russian literature can also be found: *La Pensée russe contemporaine* by Ivan Strannik (STRANNIK, 1903), and *Russian Literature* by Janko Lavrin (LAVRIN, 1927). Finally, we know from reading a diary

entry dated June 28th, 1906, that he had read Tolstoy's *Kreuzer Sonata* in French (PESSOA, 2009a: 219: 50; PESSOA, 2014b: 50; BNP/E3, 144N-15^v).

Was Pessoa's knowledge of this literature limited to his reading of these books? Are the relatively few references to it that he made in his writings the result of these readings? Or should we assume other sources of information, such as the public libraries of Lisbon? An examination of Pessoa's fleeting literary passages on Russian and Slavic works may be helpful in addressing these questions.

1.1. Pessoa and the Russian theater: Nicolai Evreinov (1879–1953) and Anton Chekhov (1860–1904)

Once does not make a habit: a Russian name appears in the dedication of one of Pessoa's works, the play *Os Estrangeiros* (1916) [*The Strangers*]: "dedicado a Evreinoff" (PESSOA, 2017: 147) [*dedicated to Evreinov*]. But if we read this play, we understand why: though consisting of just a fragment, it follows the same theatrical rules and conceptions as Evreinov's *The Theater of the Soul*, a text that Pessoa, as mentioned above, had in his library.

As in Evreinov's play, where the stage directions tell us that "the action passes in the soul in a period of half a second" (EVREINOV, 1915: 13), and whose characters are not full-fledged human beings, but different entities of one soul identified only by letters rather than full names, so too is Pessoa's play described in its stage notes as a drama "sobre a vida interior" [*on the interior life*]. The characters are "conceitos" [*concepts*], which revolve in a single individual's soul: "A" is "the concept that the individual makes of himself", "B" is "the concept that the individual thinks the interlocutor makes of him", "C" is "the concept that the individual has of his interlocutor", and so on (PESSOA, 2017: 147). Both the dedication and the obvious imitation by Pessoa of one of Evreinov's plays suggest, even without any axiological statement, that Pessoa admired his Russian counterpart. Similarly, we find this to be the case in the few lines devoted to Evreinov in a fragment of an article on theater written more or less at the same time as *Os Estrangeiros*. There, Pessoa posits that the main characteristic of modern theater is its "scientific preoccupation," namely, the use of psychological and psychiatric discoveries of the period on the unconscious. In treating this subject, Evreinov is presented as his first example:

O limite da preocupação científica na arte é o espantoso acto "O teatro da Alma" de Evreinof, em que a scena é o interior de alma humana e as personagens, designadas por A1, A2 e A3, etc., são as varias sub-individualidades componentes d'esses pseudo-simplex a que se chama o espirito. Mas neste caso o author poz intelligencia de mais e arte de menos na obra, que fica pertencendo, com a maioria das inovações litterárias e astísticas modernas, não as conquistas, mas ás curiosidades das intelligência, como os anagrammas, os desenhos de um só traço e os poemas univocalicos.

(PESSOA, 2013b: 62–63; BNP/E3, 18-66^r e 67^r)

[The limit of scientific concern in art can be found in the amazing act *The Theater of the Soul* by Evreinov, in which the scene is the interior of the human soul and the characters, designated A1, A2 and A3, etc., are the various sub-individual components of these pseudo-simplex which are called the spirit. But in this case, the author put too much intelligence and too little art in the work, which belongs, with most modern artistic and literary innovations, not to the conquests, but to the curiosities of intelligence, such as anagrams, designs with one single line, and univocalic poems.]

As Barbosa López states in his article “Pessoa e o drama russo,” the references to *The Theater of the Soul* demonstrate that not only did Pessoa have this play on his library shelf, but that he read it (BARBOSA, 2018: 31). Surely this is made all the more evident by Pessoa’s paraphrasing the words of one of Evreinov’s characters—the professor—who appears just once at the beginning of the play to introduce it thus: “The human soul is not indivisible, but on the contrary is composed of several selves, the natures of which are different. [...] There are three entities, M1, M2, M3 [...]. These three “M’s” or “selves” constitute the great integral self” (EVREINOV, 1915: 14).²

Nevertheless, if a quick reading foregrounds the positive aspects of Pessoa’s comment on Evreinov, a second look reveals some caveats. Evreinov’s play is not presented by Pessoa as a good example of his theory, but is defined as a “borderline” example (cf. the quotation “limit of scientific concern”), where the artistic dimension is subordinated to a scientific game driven solely by intelligence. Put another way, Evreinov’s play is less a work of art based on sensibility than “a curiosity of the intelligence” expressed as a mathematical formula. Such an interpretation is confirmed in a further illustration of his theory which Pessoa found in the work *Octavio*, by the Portuguese modernist Vitoriano Braga (1888–1940). Without consciously wishing to create a psychological drama, Braga contented himself with following his instinct, unconsciously incorporating into his work the scientific criteria required by modernity. The result was that Braga provided not an abstract theory, but rather a living representation of interior conflict (PESSOA, 2013b: 63; BNP/E3, 18-67^r).

In this context, Pessoa’s imitation, as it were, of Evreinov appears as an interesting experiment with the Russian dramatist’s distinct literary methods. Pessoa’s other theatrical works and fragments of plays, though similarly “static” in character as the *Strangers*, nevertheless vibrate with an emotion totally absent from the latter.

As to the other plays collected in Pessoa’s *Teatro Estático*, if a Russian influence were to be found, in my opinion and contrary to Barbosa, it would be not that of Evreinov, but of Chekhov. According to Barbosa, it was Evreinov who led Pessoa to Chekhov; in the preface to the *Theater of the Soul*, which Pessoa read, Christopher St-John compares the style of both Russian dramatists, which would thereby have

² We should mention in passing, as already observed by BARBOSA (2018: 32, note 5), that Pessoa transformed the original letters of the play, “M1, M2, M3” into “A1, A2, A3.”

prompted Pessoa to look at Chekhov, too (BARBOSA, 2018: 33); but in the end, Pessoa would have borrowed from Chekhov only some thematic motives. I am not convinced by Barbosa on this point, insofar as the Chekhov plays cited in this preface (*The Wedding, The Jubilee*) are of an entirely different style than those Chekhov dramas contained in the book Pessoa owned. Rather, I would think that even if Pessoa read Evreinov and Chekhov at about the same time, perhaps 1915–1916 (shortly after publication in their respective translations), he likely had a clear idea of Chekhov's work before encountering Evreinov through another book in his library, purchased by him in 1913 (as indicated in his hand, next to his name at the beginning of the book). That book was *La Pensée russe* by Ivan Strannik, whose chapter on Chekhov contains many underlinings by Pessoa.

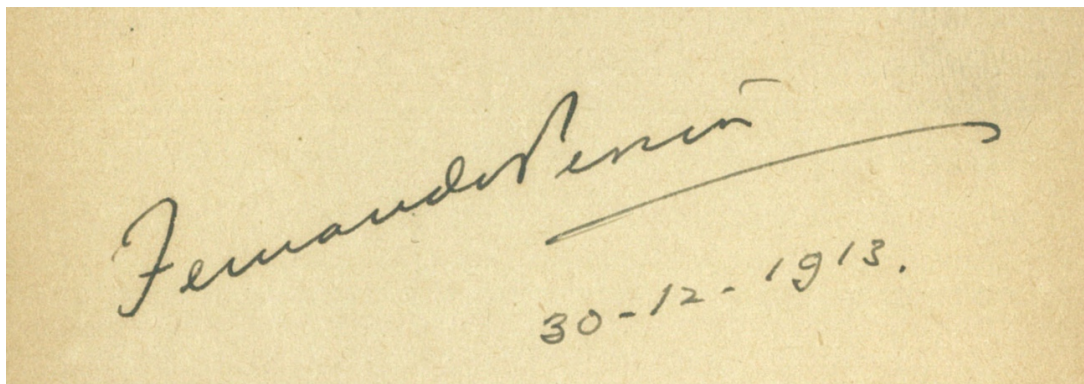
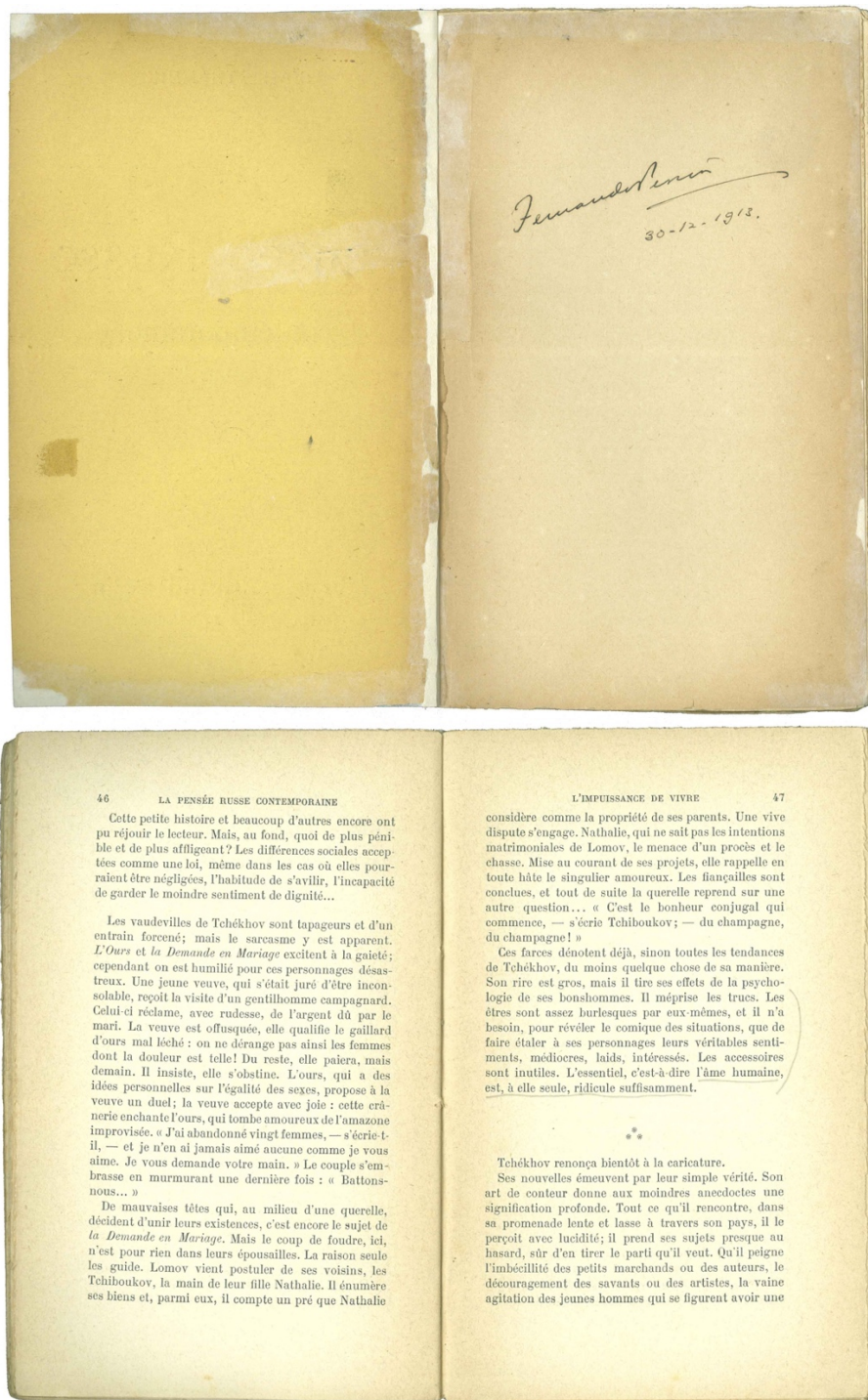


Fig. 1. Pessoa's signature with the date next to his name (CFP 8-299; detail).

It has long been established that Maeterlinck's influence on Pessoa's *Teatro estatico* was central to his conception of theater (see for example BRANTSCHEN BERCLAZ, 2018), but my own view is that, in addition to this obvious source, there could also be a significant Chekhovian influence. It is a perhaps less immediately obvious, but strictly contemporary influence (1913); that is to say, not a Chekhov who would have come only in the wake of Evreinov (1915–1916), or of a Chekhov whose influence would be solely thematic, as proposed by Barbosa.

Chekhov was at least as important as Maeterlinck in bringing about the theatrical revolution that took place at the close of the nineteenth century. During that period, both playwrights aspired to a drama that focused on "subtexts;" in other words, not upon external events, as in the theater of realism, but on the psychological states of the characters, inner conflicts, unconscious impulses, clashes with other hidden destinies, and the changes these bring about in the characters' interrelationships. The performance in Moscow in 1889 of *The Seagull*, a "polyphonic drama" where "the inner voices of the characters form an inextricable and dissonant whole" (TAMARTCHENKO, 1987: 361), marks the beginning of the "New Drama" in Russia, if not in Europe.



Figs. 2 and 3. Signature at the beginning of Strannik's book; underlining by Pessoa, p. 47 (CFP 8-299).

In his copy of Strannik's important chapter on Chekhov, entitled "L'impuissance de vivre," Pessoa annotates and underlines many elements which characterize the novelty of Chekhov's writing and which do in fact partly coincide with the aesthetics of Maeterlinck. What are the most important points enumerated by Strannik and singled out by Pessoa? First, that for Chekhov, the main concern in art is to render the human soul perceptible without artificial devices or gimmicks

("trucs") (STRANNIK, 1903: 47). As a doctor by profession, Chekhov wanted and needed to analyze and understand the soul in general, and the Russian soul in particular, as expressed or suggested by emotions and thoughts, many of which he categorized as "neurasthenic," to use the nomenclature of the time. In his literary work, be it his narratives or his dramas, he exposed the symptoms of psychological illness with empathy and an "infinite sadness." Among these symptoms, the most striking is perhaps the incapacity to act, something to which Strannik returns repeatedly in his analysis of Chekhov's work. Pessoa underlined phrases such as "le singulier défaut d'initiative et de hardiesse" (STRANNIK, 1903: 56) [*the singular lack of initiative and boldness*], the "lamentable incurie" and "flegmatisme" (STRANNIK, 1903: 59) [*lamentable carelessness and phlegmatism*], the "grand découragement de l'âme russe" (STRANNIK, 1903: 60) [*great discouragement of the Russian soul*], the "inefficacité curieuse" (STRANNIK, 1903: 61) [*curious inefficiency*], the "paralyse de l'activité" (STRANNIK, 1903: 64) [*paralysis of activity*]. In a nutshell, "les héros ne peuvent se redresser avec courage, conquérir d'un effort hardi leur place au soleil" (STRANNIK, 1903: 68) [*the heroes cannot stand up with courage, conquer their place in the sun with a bold effort*]. Another symptom is the "exaggerated silence" that can take hold between people. Or, when such silence is overcome: "On parle beaucoup mais [...] jamais pour le simple plaisir de causer. On discute âprement, on débite d'interminables monologues enthousiastes ou désespérés" (STRANNIK, 1903: 51) [*They talk a lot (...), but never just for the sake of talking. They discuss bitterly, spouting endless enthusiastic or desperate monologues*]. And if such monologues do not contain original ideas, but merely repeat the commonplace, they can also fall into vague reveries which show the difficulties of Russians in living in the present: "Les Russes aiment à se ressouvenir, n'aiment pas à vivre [...]. Pour se consoler du présent, qui jamais ne les satisfait, ils peignent le passé de couleurs agréables". So "ses plus belles pages [de Tchekhov] sont pleines de rêveries qui remplacent l'action" (STRANNIK, 1903: 60) [*Russians like to remember, they do not like to live (...). To console themselves for the present, which never satisfies them, they paint the past in pleasant colors (...). The most beautiful pages of Chekhov are full of daydreams which replace action*].

These traits are presented as typically Russian, at least among Russians of that period. According to Strannik, Chekhov's work, and particularly his dramas where there is little action and where silence, boredom, and sadness permeate, describes "une Russie lasse, énervée, fataliste, et sans hardiesse ni entrain, où les talents se meurent dès la première jeunesse" (STRANNIK, 1903: 83) [*a weary, angry, fatalistic Russia, without boldness or perkiness, where talents die from earliest youth*]; this perhaps explains why this new approach was immediately understood and embraced in Russia. In Portugal, on the other hand, as claimed by Freitas and Ferrari, "un teatro en que o silêncio e a ausência desempenham um papel principal é um teatro sem precedência" (FREITAS & FERRARI, 2017: 355) [*a theater in which silence and absence play a major role is a theater without precedent*]. This is all the more astonishing since, if we

are to go by Pessoa's marginal comments to Strannik's analysis, the basic situation in Russia and Portugal would have been very similar at that time. Indeed, Strannik explains Chekhov's work by the fact that "La Russie est un pays de fécondité qui avorte. Dans le peuple, qui cependant est riche en dons naturels, l'inertie intellectuelle et morale n'est pas encore ébranlée" [*Russia is a country of abortive fertility. In the people, however rich in natural gifts, intellectual and moral inertia are not yet shaken*]. Pessoa not only underlines these sentiments, but adds in the margin, "cf. com Portugal" (STRANNIK, 1903: 61) [*just like Portugal*]³—that is to say that these features could just as well be ascribed to Portugal. Indeed, he described Portugal in similar terms, and thought that the introduction of new literary movements, like that of *intersectionism*, could help to shake this apathy:

Será talvez útil — penso — lançar esse corrente [o Interseccionismo] como corrente, mas não com fins meramente artísticos, mas, pensando esse acto a fundo, como uma série de ideias que urge atirar para a publicidade para que possam agir sobre o psiquismo nacional, que precisa trabalhado e percorrido em todas as direcções por novas correntes de ideias e emoções que nos arranquem à nossa estagnação.

(PESSOA, 1998: 141; in a letter of Jan. 19, 1915, also included in PESSOA, 2009b)

[*It may be useful, I think, to launch this current (Intersectionism) as a current, not for merely artistic purposes, but thinking of this act in depth, as a series of ideas that must be thrown into advertising, so that they can act on the national psyche, which needs to be worked on and crossed in all directions by new currents of ideas and emotions that can pull us out of our stagnation.*]

In theatrical works, if we are to extrapolate from Pessoa's response to Strannik's chapter on Chekhov, it could be plays that, like Chekhov's, would be able to cope with such national features by mirroring them. In any event, Pessoa's most characteristic "static play," the *Marinheiro* (1914), has many Chekhovian characteristics, at least those described by Strannik as central to his style: for example, the three *veladoras* or watchwomen, who are at a loss for what to do and are perhaps assigned their roles precisely to underscore this very inertia,³ alternate in a "dialogue" between silence and volubility. They appear to be afraid of their own silences:

(Uma pausa) *Primeira* – Minha irmã, porque é que você cala-se?
Segunda – Não se deve falar demasiado.

(PESSOA, 2017: 39)

[*(Silence) First: My sister, why do you shut up?*
Second: We mustn't speak too much.]

³ This interpretation seems to be confirmed by fragments from that play, written in Portuguese, French and English, in 1915 and 1916, where the three women are designated simply "1st," "2nd," "3rd" (PESSOA, 2017: 252).

These silences are soon followed by meaningless chatter:

Primeira – Em todo o caso fallae ... Importa tão pouco o que dizemos ou não dizemos ... O nosso mister é inútil como a Vida ... Porque fallo eu sem querer falar?

(PESSOA, 2017: 41 and 46)

[*First: Speak in any case ... It doesn't matter what we say or don't say ... Our office is as useless as Life ... Why do I speak when I don't want to speak?*]

Alternatively, their conversation is filled with speech which refers to a past which never existed, and for this reason can be recollected as beautiful:

Fallamos de um passado que não tivéssemos tido... Todo este paiz é muito triste... Aquello onde eu vivi outr'ora era menos triste.

(PESSOA, 2017: 32)

[*We talk about a past that we would never have had... This whole country is very sad ... Where I lived once was less sad.*]

One cannot help noticing that these watchwomen, who call each other “sisters,” are reminiscent of Chekhov’s “three sisters,” but here reduced to their essence; both groups of sisters are full of doubts concerning what life is, or how to live, and are waiting for explanations that never come.

Só viver é que faz mal... É tão estranho estar a viver... Há qualquer cousa, que não sei o que é... qualquer cousa que explicaria isto tudo.

(PESSOA, 2017: 33, 45, 41)

[*Our living is bad ... It is so strange to be living ... There is one thing, I don't know what it is ... one thing that would explain all this.*]

These musings of Pessoa’s watchwomen echo the desperate moans of Chekhov’s sisters, as recopied by Strannik in a French version:

Nous restons seules... Il faut vivre, il faut vivre! [...] Encore un peu, et nous saurons pourquoi nous existons, pourquoi nous souffrons! Ah! savoir! savoir!...

(STRANNIK, 1903: 74–75)

[*We're left alone ... We have to live, we have to live! (...) A little more, and we will know why we exist, why we suffer! Ah! to know! to know!...*]

The parallels in their emotions and behaviors are striking.

We might even venture provocatively to surmise that it is Chekhov who led Pessoa to Maeterlinck (also discovered by Pessoa in 1913), since Pessoa underlined passages in Strannik’s book which drew a comparison between Chekhov and Maeterlinck, and which could have sparked his interest in the Belgian playwright:

“Bien que d’une tonalité grise, sa peinture est extrêmement caractéristique et frappante. Il y a chez lui, du reste, un curieux mélange du réalisme le plus exact et de ce procédé suggestif qu’a Maeterlinck d’évoquer des sentiments complexes sans les analyser”(STRANNIK, 1903: 52) [*Although of a grey tone, his painting is extremely characteristic and striking. There is, moreover, a curious mixture of the most exact realism and Maeterlinck’s suggestive process of evoking complex feelings without analyzing them*].

But absent any explicit statements by Pessoa about Chekhov or when he first discovered Chekhov’s work, we must relegate these thoughts about Maeterlinck’s or Chekhov’s priorities to the realm of supposition.

1.2. Pessoa and the Russian novelists: Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881), Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910), Maxim Gorky (1868–1936)

a) The Russian novelists in Pessoa’s critical work

The notebooks of the young Pessoa already contain the names of several Russian authors, principally in connection with his critical and theoretical writings for book projects on the relationships between genius, madness, and degeneration. Although such projects were never completed, the notes themselves were published in 2006 in a two-volume series entitled *Escritos sobre Génio e Loucura*, edited by Jerónimo Pizarro (PESSOA, 2006b). These documents show that, from a relatively early age, Pessoa was drawn to questions of both psychological and intellectual norms and abnormalities. This interest may have been due to the fact that he had an aunt who had been diagnosed as “mad,” alongside his belief that he was himself an unstable personality, while simultaneously convinced of his own intellectual superiority. In pursuit of answers to his questions, he perused all kinds of medical and psychiatric works; at the top of his list was *Entartung* (1894) [*Degeneration*], by Max Nordau, which from his notes, we know he read in 1907 in a French translation, *Dégénérescence*. It is clear from the copious notes he made from this book (mainly in French, but with interventions in English by his heteronym Alexander Search), which are published in the *Escritos*, that the work made a strong impression on him. Nordau’s thesis was that society at the close of the nineteenth century was in full degenerative mode, a decline that also manifested itself in the arts. Nordau reviews writers of various nationalities, first highlighting their weak and, in his view, distorted thinking and, second, claiming that such aberrations went unnoticed by most readers, because they were themselves mentally afflicted in the same way. These statements imply that there is a symbiosis and tight interaction between art and *fin-de-siècle* life, the one being at the same time the cause and the expression of the degenerate character of the other. The era would be locked in a vicious circle, and only by being able to perceive this circularity would one break free of its grip.

Nordau's text paid attention to two giants of Russian literature of that time: Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. Nordau devotes a whole chapter to Tolstoy, entitled "Tolstoism" (NORDAU, 1895: 144–171). Here, Nordau argued that the writer's strong influence on his contemporaries was due less to his artistic and aesthetic qualities than to his mystical conception of the world which, according to Nordau, was completely emotional and "insane," revealing the fundamental instability of Tolstoy's mind. Pessoa copied or paraphrased, without offering his own judgments, several sentences from this chapter, principally those which dealt with the description of Tolstoy's allegedly degenerate character: "*Vision nette* of things; yet inability to perceive their *rappports*" (PESSOA, 2006b: 661); "*système à la fois matérialiste, panthéiste, chrétien, ascétique, rousseaulâtre et communiste*" in which "*le mysticisme est toute obscurité et incohérence malades de pensée accompagnées d'émotivité*" (PESSOA, 2006b: 662) [*a system at the same time materialist, pantheistic, Christian, ascetic, rousseaulatrous and communist (...), in which mysticism is a complete and pathological obscurity and inconsistency of thought accompanied by emotionality*]; "*a particular form of manie du doute*," which Kowalewski would define as "*psychose dégénérative*" and which expresses itself in Tolstoy's habit of "*attacking tradition for tradition*" (PESSOA, 2006b: 662). Pessoa also noted statements by Nordau that were supposed to explain why the work of an author so obviously suffering from mental aberration could find an audience: "*L'hystérie d'épuisement si répandue était le sol indispensable sur lequel seul pouvait prospérer le tolstoïsme*" (PESSOA, 2006b: 663) [*The widespread hysteria of exhaustion was the indispensable soil on which only Tolstoyism could thrive*]; "Since Nordau argues that the *Sonate [à Kreutzer]* is less artistic than the earliest works, and since it was through the *Sonate* that T[olstoy] was famous, it is obvious that his fame is not due to his artistic merits" (PESSOA, 2006b: 662). If, according to his reading diaries, Pessoa had read the *Kreutzer Sonata* in 1906, and therefore would already have been familiar with the work before reading Nordau, it is surprising that he did not push back on, or at least question Nordau's judgment as to why the *Sonata* should be of such low artistic value. In any event, Pessoa not only accepted, it would seem, Nordau's general thesis—and even transposed it in his French heteronym Jean Seul's writings about the contemporary decadence of art and society (cf. PESSOA, 2006a) but, if we take at face value his brief but harsh assessment of Tolstoy in one of his fragments on literary critics dealing first with Milton and Shakespeare, he appears to have completely embraced Nordau's opinion of the Russian writer:

É preciso ser um doutor para preferir Shakespeare a Milton. Tolstoi, apesar de um pobre degenerado, incapaz de produção artística com caracter de estavel e duradoura – excepto nos olhos daltônicos dos modernos – viu qualquer cousa claro neste assumpto. Não muito, mas o infeliz fez o que pode.

(PESSOA, 2013b: 183)

[You have to be a doctor to prefer Shakespeare to Milton. Tolstoy, in spite of being a poor degenerate, incapable of artistic production with a stable and lasting character—except in the colorblind eyes of the moderns—saw something clearly in this matter. Not much, but the unfortunate did what he could.]

Nordau's voice, judgment and vocabulary can plainly be discerned in such expressions as "poor degenerate," "incapable of artistic production," "except in the colorblind eyes of the moderns."

Further reflections and readings would, unsurprisingly, help Pessoa adopt a more critical attitude towards Nordau. For example, he purchased for his private library a book published anonymously in 1895 titled *Regeneration. A Reply to Max Nordau* (BUTLER, 1985), which was in fact co-authored by the American educator Nicholas Murray Butler, longtime president of Columbia University and winner of the 1931 Nobel Peace Prize, and the English social writer Alfred Egmont Hake. This book challenged Nordau's thesis that most of the *fin-de-siècle* authors were degenerate, and was carefully reviewed by Pessoa, judging by the many underlining and markings he made in the margins; the chapter where the authors defend Tolstoy's lifestyle and writing is particularly heavily notated.

In this chapter, Butler and Hake take account of the external circumstances of the world in which Tolstoyism developed: a country where the slightest dissent could lead to prison or worse. "Tolstoy had only two courses open to him: either to expatriate [...] or to adopt the line of action he did" (BUTLER, 1985: 115) – which was to live among peasants and to contribute as much as he could to their moral and intellectual education. That his confidence in the masses had its source in faith and emotion rather than strict knowledge, as Nordau posited, did not necessarily make Tolstoy a degenerate, argued the authors. Moreover, they identify certain distortions and inaccuracies by Nordau, as well as bad faith in many of his arguments against Tolstoy. For Butler and Hake, Tolstoy's ethics represented an admirable ideal, the aim of which was to "regenerate" the morale of the country, not to poison it.

While we do find at the beginning of the Tolstoy chapter in *Regeneration. A Reply to Max Nordau* some marginal comments by Pessoa, such as "emotional explication again" (BUTLER, 1895: 116–117), which may show continued adherence to Nordau's position, further markings in the body of the chapter ("true," and other similar comments) indicate that Nordau's refutation by the authors of the book might have increased Pessoa's skepticism towards the former's text. We can suppose that it is after the perusal of that book that the Portuguese author ventured towards disagreement with Nordau concerning Tolstoy: "Nordau declares that Tolstoy's benevolence is a mental stigma of degeneration. But all degenerates have it not" (PESSOA, 2006b: 95). Nonetheless, it remained the case that Pessoa did retain reservations about Tolstoy's talent that would last throughout his life. In a letter to João Gaspar Simões of 1931, for example, he expressed the possibility that, with time,

the Portuguese writer José Régio might well become more famous than Gide or Tolstoy. And he added: “Quanto ao Tolstoi, basta ser russo para eu ter dificuldade em dar por ele” (PESSOA, 1999a: 247) [As to Tolstoy, just the fact of being Russian makes it hard for me to notice him].

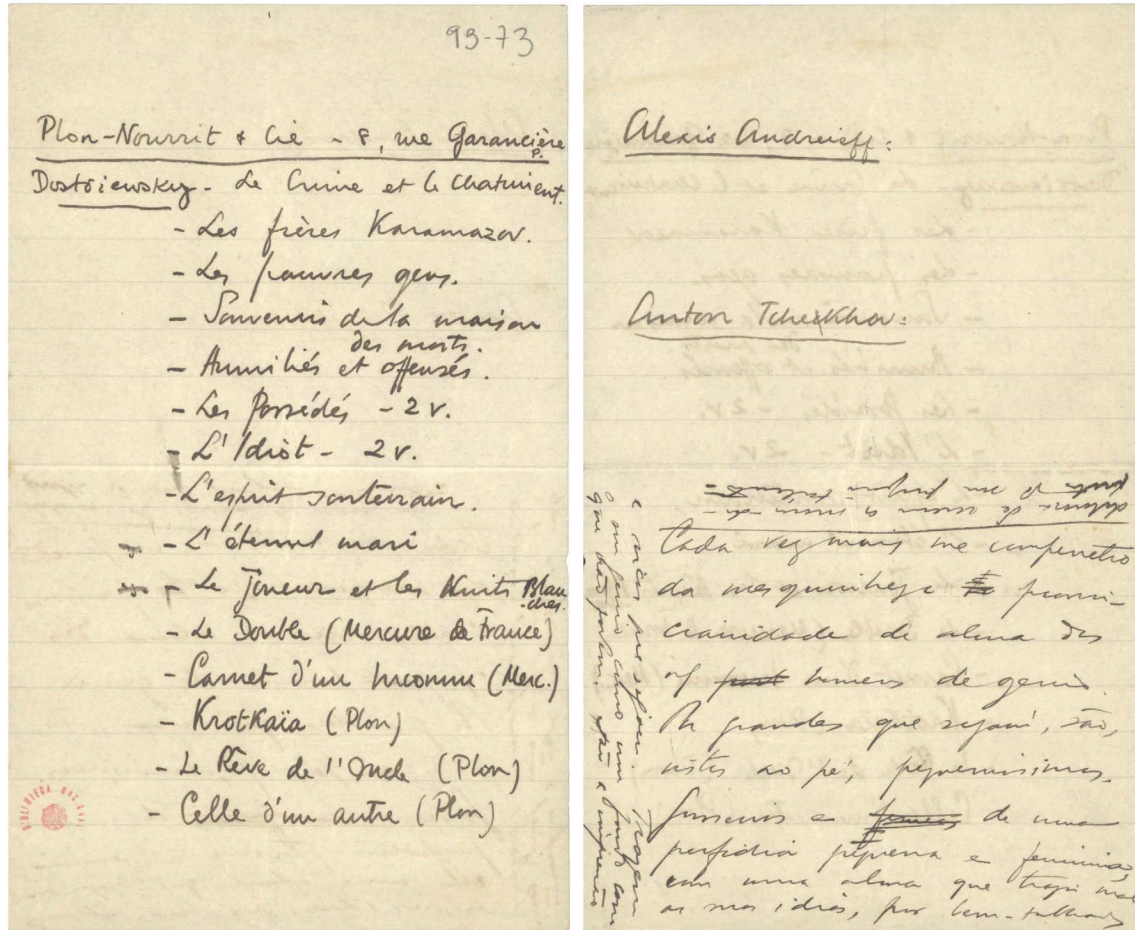
A similar evolution took place in Pessoa’s reflections with respect to Dostoevsky. Nordau did not dedicate a whole chapter to the latter as he did for Tolstoy, but he quotes him in his chapter “The Parodies of Mysticism” (NORDAU, 1895: 214–240) as a good example of a writer’s specific mental alienation: panophobia, an error of consciousness which consists in finding the causes of representations of fear and anxiety in the external world, when in fact they are produced by pathological processes rooted in the unconscious. In support of his statement, the German alienist quotes a passage from Dostoevsky’s novel *Humiliated and Insulted*, where the narrator speaking in the first person, falsely identified by Nordau with Dostoevsky (Nordau reads novels as if there were biographies!), explains that “as soon as it grew dusk,” he gradually fell into a state of mind similar to a “mystic fright” (NORDAU, 1895: 226). We have no information about what Pessoa knew about Dostoevsky at this time. But in the notes he took on Nordau’s book, we find this assessment: “Sensations of vague fear characteristic of degenerates. Quotes from Dostoevsky [...]. Magnan calls it *anxiomanie* and declares it a very usual stigma of degeneration. A man puts the fear he feels outside him in the external world” (PESSOA, 2006b: 666).

Other books on mental illness that Pessoa read also drew his attention towards Dostoevsky: Paul Voivenel’s article, “Du rôle de la maladie dans l’inspiration littéraire,” published in the *Mercure de France* in 1911, was in Pessoa’s library and liberally annotated by him. According to Voivenel, Dostoevsky and Flaubert were second-class writers because their inspiration, instead of coming from a brain which functioned poetically without discontinuity, needed the nervous excitation of epilepsy to be activated (VOIVENEL, 1911: 314). We can suppose that it is after this reading that Pessoa wrote that he knew that literary “ideation” is possessed not only by hysterics and neurasthenics, but also by epileptics like Flaubert and Dostoevsky (PESSOA, 2006b: 153).

Be that as it may, these repeated allusions to Dostoevsky in books examining the relationship between madness and literature led Pessoa to additional specific works on the topic, such as Gaston Loygue’s study of 1903, *Un homme de génie. Th.-M. Dostoiewsky – étude médico-psychologique*⁴, which he quotes in his bibliographical list (PESSOA, 2006b: 610), and which we know he read since he quotes from it (PESSOA, 2006b: 614). This text is a eulogy to Dostoevsky and to his work, whose clinical beauty Loygue highly praises: thanks to his considerable power of analysis, Dostoevsky, without any knowledge in the field of psychiatry, would have been able

⁴ This book is not in Pessoa’s private library.

to describe extraordinary psychopathic types at a time when societal interest was not yet oriented towards such research. Nor does Loygue hesitate to criticize Nordau for having claimed that the mysticism of the Russian writer was a “pathognomonic mental stigma of degeneration” (LOYGUE, 1903: 112).



Figs. 4 and 5. List of fifteen novels by Dostoevsky (BNP/E3, 93-73^r, 73^v).

This work by Loygue likely helped Pessoa to develop his own opinion on Dostoevsky, or at least to arouse a greater interest in him. Though we cannot find any clear opinions recorded by Pessoa on the Russian author, in a note dating approximately from 1914–1915⁵ and belonging to his “Genius and Madness” projects, Pessoa drew up a list of fifteen novels by Dostoevsky, in French translation, dating from 1884 to 1906 (PESSOA, 2006b: 742; cf. Fig. 3). What does this list indicate? Are these the books Pessoa intended to read? From where did he take this list? From the bibliography given by Loygue at the end of his book? Unlikely, since Loygue’s list was less complete. Or from other sources, like the list of Dostoevsky’s books in French, given by André Gide in a footnote to his brief essay *Dostoïevski d’après sa correspondance*, already published in *La Grande Revue* in 1908? This last hypothesis is

⁵ According to Jerónimo Pizarro.

the most plausible,⁶ since all the books listed by Pessoa⁷ can be found in Gide's list too. What this list shows, in any case, is that Dostoevsky was certainly meant to play an important role in his projects on psychiatry and literature, maybe as important as that of Shelley, about whom fragments of essays by Pessoa have been preserved.

Books like Loyge's or Butler and Hake's allowed Pessoa to become aware first of the limits, and then of the arbitrary and unscientific character of Nordau's theories. In 1914, he was able to write: "As relações da psiquiatria com a literatura não tem sido felizes. [...] O trabalho psiquiátrico tem sido fortemente invadido de superstição científica e de indisciplina intelectual. Algumas obras, como a de Nordau [...] pertencem ao charlatanismo científico" (PESSOA, 2006b: 393) [*The relationships of psychiatry with literature have not been happy (...). The work of psychiatry has been strongly invaded by scientific superstition and intellectual indiscipline. Some works, like Nordau's (...) belong to scientific charlatanism*].

This does not mean that Pessoa felt that a literary work could not be the object of psychiatric analysis. But

[...] o que é preciso é nunca elevar a analyse psiquiátrica a critério estético. Perante uma obra literária, o psiquiatra nunca deve esquecer que é só psiquiatra, e não crítico literário [...]. Tendo descoberto que tal autor era doido, chamaram a sua obra má; quando a única afirmação científica que poderiam fazer é que esse autor era doido, e mais nada.

(PESSOA, 2006b: 393)

[(...) what is needed is never to transform psychiatric analysis into aesthetic criteria. Faced with a literary work, the psychiatrist must never forget that he is only a psychiatrist, and not a literary critic (...). Having discovered that a specific author was insane, they said that his work was bad; whereas the only scientific statement they could make was that this author was insane, and that's all.]

But for Pessoa, the designation of "insane" itself should not be applied haphazardly. The "great inspired" figures are not necessarily sick or mad, but maladjusted. Genius is maladjustment, unlike great intelligence, which is normative and able to adapt quickly to everything. Where Loygue had summarized Dostoevsky's case by writing that "le génie [est] la réalisation anticipée d'un type supérieur d'humanité ou d'intelligence qui n'apparaîtra, normal et adapté à une existence nouvelle, qu'à un stade ultérieur de l'évolution" (LOYGUE, 1903: 181) [*Genius is the anticipated realization of a superior type of humanity or intelligence which will only appear, normal and adapted to a new existence, at a later stage of evolution*], Pessoa pursues this notion: "Que espécie de inadaptação é o gênio? Formulou se já uma hipótese, no sentido de que o gênio seria uma espécie de adaptação a causas futuras; e assim se pronuncia, contra

⁶ With thanks to Jerónimo Pizarro for having made me aware of such "curiosity".

⁷ To this list Pessoa added two more Russian names: Alexis Andreieff and Anton Tchekhov (written with the French spelling)—both references could have been found in Strannik's book (STRANNIK, 1903).

o termo de *degenerados*, ou de *progenerados*” (PESSOA, 2006b: 397) [*What kind of maladjustment is genius? A hypothesis has already been formulated, in the sense that genius would be a kind of adaptation to future causes; and thus is pronounced, against the term of degenerates, the one of progenerates*].

Would Pessoa include Dostoevsky, as Loygue did, in the category of *progenerates*? A letter dated October 22, 1930 to Karl Germer, containing a short reference to Dostoevsky, suggests that this may be the case. There, the poet explains that Simões, the best of the contemporary young Portuguese critics, wrote an essay on him [Pessoa] that was included in his book *Temas*, “in the fair company” of essays on Dostoevsky and Proust (PESSOA, 2019: 360). If the “super-Camões” of the future (whom Pessoa considered himself to be) can be in such fair company as this, it must be because these writers and he are made of the same stuff...

As we see, then, Russian novelists are not absent from Pessoa’s critical reflections and correspondence, but at first glance Pessoa appears not to attribute any special significance to them: they are just names, cited because they appear in the books that he needed for his research. If they are in some way qualified, it is merely with a few words and without any consequent commentary. If a value judgment appears, it is a measured one which, on the basis of the rare letters in which Pessoa mentions such Russian novelists, seems to take a positive direction in the case of Dostoevsky and a negative one with Tolstoy—but which, in the final analysis, does not provide us with a consistent idea of what Pessoa really thought about either of them.

b) The Russian novelists in Pessoa’s literary work

In Pessoa’s literary work, there is a unique poem, written by his heteronym Álvaro de Campos. It is unique both in the sense that it is the only one which refers to Russian authors, but also because it seems to have been written entirely under the aegis of Russian writers. In the poem “Cruzou por mim, veio ter comigo, numa rua da Baixa,” the “lyrical I” openly takes contemporary Russian literature as a point of comparison for his own behavior, even if the analogy—as we have come to expect—is subtly done.

Cruzou por mim, veio ter comigo, numa rua da Baixa
 Aquele homem malvestido, pedinte por profissão que se lhe vê na cara
 Que simpatiza comigo e eu simpatizo com ele;
 E reciprocamente, num gesto largo, transbordante, dei-lhe tudo quanto tinha
 (Excepto, naturalmente, o que estava na algibeira onde trago mais dinheiro:
 Não sou parvo nem romancista russo, aplicado,
 E romantismo, sim, mas devagar...).

Sinto urna simpatia por essa gente toda,
 Sobretudo quando não merece simpatia.

Sim, eu sou também vadio e pedinte,
E sou-o também por minha culpa.
Ser vadio e pedinte não é ser vadio e pedinte:
É estar ao lado da escala social,
É não ser adaptável às normas da vida,
Às normas reais ou sentimentais da vida —
Não ser Juiz do Supremo, empregado certo, prostituta,
Não ser pobre a valer, operário explorado,
Não ser doente de uma doença incurável,
Não ser sedento de justiça, ou capitão de cavalaria
Não ser, enfim, aquelas pessoas sociais dos novelistas
Que se fartam de letras porque têm razão para chorar lágrimas,
E se revoltam contra a vida social porque têm razão para isso supor.
Não: tudo menos ter razão!
Tudo menos importar-me com a humanidade!
Tudo menos ceder ao humanitarismo!
De que serve uma sensação se há uma razão exterior para ela?

Sim, ser vadio e pedinte, como eu sou,
Não é ser vadio e pedinte, o que é corrente:
É ser isolado na alma, e isso é que é ser vadio,
É ter que pedir aos dias que passem, e nos deixem, e isso é que é ser pedinte.

Tudo mais é estúpido como um Dostoievski ou um Gorki.
Tudo mais é ter fome ou não ter que vestir.
E, mesmo que isso aconteça, isso acontece a tanta gente
Que nem vale a pena ter pena da gente a quem isso acontece.
Sou vadio e pedinte a valer, isto é, no sentido translatado,
E estou-me rebolando numa grande caridade por mim.

Coitado do Álvaro de Campos!
Tão isolado na vida! Tão deprimido nas sensações!
Coitado dele, enfiado na poltrona da sua melancolia!
Coitado dele, que com lágrimas (autênticas) nos olhos,
Deu hoje, num gesto largo, liberal e moscovita,
Tudo quanto tinha, na algibeira em que tinha pouco, àquele
Pobre que não era pobre, que tinha olhos tristes por profissão.

Coitado do Álvaro de Campos, com quem ninguém se importa!
Coitado dele que tem tanta pena de si mesmo!

E, sim, coitado dele!
Mais coitado dele que de muitos que são vadios e vadiam,
Que são pedintes e pedem,
Porque a alma humana é um abismo.

Eu é que sei. Coitado dele!

Que bom poder-me revoltar num comício dentro da minha alma!

Mas até nem parvo sou!
 Nem tenho a defesa de poder ter opiniões sociais.
 Não tenho, mesmo, defesa nenhuma: sou lúcido.

Não me queiram converter a convicção: sou lúcido.
 Já disse: Sou lúcido.
 Nada de estéticas com coração: Sou lúcido.
 Merda! Sou lúcido.

(PESSOA, 2014a: 339–342)

*[That ill dressed man, a beggar by profession as you can tell by his face,
 Crossed my path, came to join me in a street in the town,
 That man who likes me and I like him;
 And mutually, with a sweep of the hand, brimfull, I gave him all I had
 (Except, it's clear, what was in the pocket where I carry most money:
 I'm no miser, but neither am I a Russian novelist, hard working,
 Andas for romanticism, yes, but only by degrees ...)*

*I have a feeling for all these people,
 Especially when they deserve no such feeling.
 Yes, I, too, am a vagrant and a beggar,
 And it's my own fault that I am that way.
 To be a vagrant and a beggar, is not to be a vagrant and a beggar:
 It's to be at the side of the social ladder,
 And to be unadaptable to the rules of life,
 To the real or sentimental rules of life –
 Not to be High Court Judge, man of fixed employment, prostitute,
 Not to be poor in earnest, exploited worker,
 Not to be sick with an incurable sickness,
 Not to be eager for justice, nor captain in the cavalry,
 Not to be, put shortly, those social people of novelists,
 Who get bored with their writing, because they have good cause to cry their tears,
 Who revolt against the social life, because they have good cause to think it so.
 No: everything but good cause!
 Everything but worry myself over humanity!
 Everything but give in to humanitarianism!
 Of what use can a feeling be, if there is some external cause for it?*

*Yes, to be a vagrant and a beggar as I am,
 Is not, as is usually thought, to be a vagrant and a beggar:
 Being a vagrant is being alone in your soul,
 And being a beggar is having to beg the days to pass and leave us.*

*Anything else is stupid, like Dostoevsky or Gorky.
 Anything else is being hungry or not having any clothes.
 And although this happens, it happens to so many people
 That it is not worth feeling sorry for the people to whom it happens.
 I am a vagrant and beggar in earnest – that is, in a metaphoric sense,
 And I'm rolling myself along into a great charity for me!*

Poor Álvaro de Campos!
 All alone in life! So downcast in his feelings;
 Poor thing, strung on to the armchair of his melancholy.
 Poor thing, with tears (real ones) in his eyes,
 Today he gave with a sweep of the hand, liberal and Muscovite,
 All that he had, from the pocket in which he had little, to that
 Poor man who was not poor, and had sad eyes as part of his profession.

Poor Álvaro de Campos, whom no one worries about!
 Poor thing, who is so sorry for himself!

Yes indeed, poor thing!
 More so indeed than man who are vagrants and loiter,
 Who are beggars and beg,
 Because the human soul is an abyss.

It's I who knows. Poor thing that he is!

How good it would be to rebel at a rally inside my own soul!
 But I 'm not even a miser!
 I don't have the defence of being able to have social opinions.
 I don't even have any defence; I am lucid.

Don't you try and convert me to some conviction: I am lucid.
 I have said it already: I am lucid.
 None of your aesthetics with heart: I am lucid.
 Shit! I am lucid.]

(PESSOA, transl. by Michael Gordon Lloyd, in *Persona*, n.º 7, 1982: 48-49)

The poem is about the poet's encounter in the street with a "beggar by profession." The sympathy between them is immediate and reciprocal, because they recognize in each other a brother in vagrancy. The generous poet, "with a sweep of the hand," gives alms to the tramp, "everything he had," he says, but then confesses that this "everything" concerned the money he had in one pocket, but not that which he had in the other. Indeed, he is neither a complete fool nor an "industrious Russian novelist," he adds without explanation. Nor is he a "romantic" belonging to "the social people of novelists" who have good causes to defend, because he has no "humanitarianism" in him. He then expands on the difference between himself and the man he met: both are vagrants and beggars, but not of the same kind. He is one only in a figurative sense—a vagrant in his soul because he is incapable of adapting to conventional norms, a beggar because he wishes the days to pass as soon as possible; whereas the other kind of vagrant and beggar, the one who does not know how to eat and how to dress, is "stupid like a Dostoevsky or a Gorky." The poor are not to be pitied, he reflects, in fact there are so many of them in the world that their condition is banal. On the other hand, he himself is in need of charity: he is a "poor thing" because of his isolation and depression. Yet he insists again on the fact that

he had, nonetheless, “with a sweep of the hand,” as a “liberal and Muscovite,” given today “all that he had, from the pocket in which he had little,” to the poor man he had met. The three last stanzas of the poem are simply a long and repetitive lament: “poor Álvaro de Campos,” whose main problem is that he is “lucid.”

Why these three completely unusual, even unostentatious, references to Russia and Russian literature, associated with an equally unusual topic for Pessoa, that of vagrancy? Even if this poem is one of Álvaro de Campos’ undated poems, it seems probable, given its style and theme (insistence on his lucidity, his wanderings), that it can be placed at least after the Great Odes and “Lisbon Revisited”,⁸ that is, after 1927 or even later. For this poem too, Strannik’s book, abundantly annotated by Pessoa as mentioned above, can offer a few interpretative keys. Strannik reflects on the changes that the abolition of serfdom (1861) brought in Russian literature, and focusses on the shifting of writers’ interest from the privileged classes of society to the poor (peasants, workers, employees)—a movement actually already seen in the work of Nikolai Gogol in the first half of the century. According to Strannik, concerns about moral and social action dominated Russian literature at the turn of the century, and he illustrates this statement with four chapters on contemporary Russian authors. The first chapter, as already mentioned, is dedicated to Chekhov and “the inability to live”; the second concerns Maxim Gorky and “the spirit of vagrancy”; the third, Vladimir Korolenko and “the feeling of pity”; and the fourth is on Leo Tolstoy, and “orthodoxy and heterodoxy.”

If reading Strannik’s chapter on Chekhov is helpful in understanding Pessoa’s conception of theater on a thematic and formal level, the chapters on Gorky, Korolenko and Tolstoy certainly help to make sense of the allusions to Russian novelists in Campos’ poem. Actually, all three could be included under the generic expression in the first stanza of an “industrious Russian novelist,” a “romantic” of the highest order, because able to give everything he has to the poor—all three are described by Strannik as activists fighting against social inequities and practicing humanitarianism, attributes also expressed in their novels. Among them, Tolstoy, well known for his emotionality and generosity (the distribution of his personal fortune to the destitute and, partly because of that, described as “degenerate” by Nordau), and mentioned by Strannik as having taken care of starving people (STRANNIK, 1903: 24)—would probably best fit that description. The same allusion to “sentimental” Russian writers can be found in an expression in the last third of the poem, when the poet comes back to his generous “sweep of the hand” and describes it now as “liberal and Muscovite”—Muscovite understood here as a synonym of “Russian.”

As to the poem’s specific references to Dostoevsky and Gorky, the latter becomes immediately clear with reference to Strannik’s book. The critic sees the

⁸ I express here the opinion of Jerónimo Pizarro. My thanks to him for our discussions on this topic.

introduction of the character of the vagrant in literature as an innovation of Gorky's, and it is accordingly not surprising that a poem on vagrancy should refer to him. On Dostoevsky, however, Strannik offers little, since he has no chapter on him—just a few mentions here and there to illustrate the terror exerted by the tsarist regime on intellectuals who dared criticize the authorities. Nevertheless, Pessoa drew upon other sources: the medical opinions of Nordau on Dostoevsky's pathological impressionability, or Loygue on his capacity to be both deeply affected by events and to analyze the resulting emotional states. Moreover, if we assume that the poem was written after 1927, there is another book on Russian literature in Pessoa's library, *Russian Literature* by Lavrin, published in 1927 (we have no information, however, about when Pessoa bought it), that contains a chapter on Dostoevsky. Curiously enough, only one paragraph in the whole book has a marginal handmark (vertical line) by Pessoa, which appears in the Dostoevsky chapter, where Lavrin first expresses his admiration for *The House of the Dead* (1861)—a book which recounts Dostoevsky's experience of forced labor in Siberia among the worst criminals, and comments upon its amazing "forgiving tone," "intuition," and "insight into the essence of crimes and criminals." In the same paragraph, Lavrin also remarks on *The Offended and the Injured*, an "utterly humanitarian novel" which is "his [Dostoevsky's] worst book, by the way" (LAVRIN, 1927: 48). This kind of description coincides very well with Campos' perception of Russian novelists as "social people," "humanitarian," "romantic," "sentimental" and, consequently, "stupid."

The tone of the whole poem is patronizing, even contemptuous, towards Russian authors. But recall that Pessoa is "multiple" and that we are confronted here by a poem where the "lyrical I" refers to Álvaro de Campos and is not necessarily indicative of what Pessoa was really thinking. As an advocate of individualism and sensationism, and as an adversary of sentimentalism and humanitarianism, the poet de Campos can "himself" castigate the charitable gestures of the Russian novelists.

Pessoa's references to Russian authors are, to be sure, limited and fleeting, all the more so when we compare them to his voluminous musings on other European literature. But they exist and appear as concrete traces of his readings; when carefully examined, they reveal a deeper knowledge of and interest in Russian literature than one might expect. Nevertheless, again and again, because of the dryness and conciseness of Pessoa's observations, we are thrown back upon assumptions rather than certainties in discerning his real opinions on Russian writers and literature.

2. Pessoa and Russian / Soviet politics

It is customary to separate Pessoa's political texts from his literary production, Pessoa the political thinker (who speaks in his own name) from Pessoa the poet (the orthonym as well as the heteronyms). This separation was favored by Pessoa

himself, who in his notes on *Sensacionismo*, for example, established a clear distinction between the poet and the political thinker. He observed that:

Todo o artista que dá à sua arte um fim extra-artístico é um infame. É, além disso, um degenerado no pior dos sentidos que a palavra não tem. É, além disso e por isso, um antissocial. A maneira de o artista colaborar utilmente na vida da sociedade a que pertence – é não colaborar nela.

(PESSOA, 2009: 184; 2015a: 80; BNP/E3, 20-91^v)

[Every artist who gives his art an extra-artistic end is an infamous one. He is also a degenerate in the worst sense of the word. He is, therefore, antisocial. The way for the artist to collaborate effectively in the life of the society to which he belongs—is, in fact, not to collaborate at all.]

The proper functioning of a society, in his view, then, is based on a clear division of labor. Despite these beliefs, he did not always follow his own prescriptions; he included politics in his literary work from the outset of his career, both through his own authorship and his heteronyms. Moreover, his critical political writing and his political poetry often echo one another: there are political articles that can be seen as a theorizing of some poems, and there are poems that serve as an illustration of the theory. To read them together is useful in understanding Pessoa's political thinking, particularly on Russia. For if, as we have noted earlier, we have been able to identify a certain ambiguity on the poet's part in relation to Russian literature, it seems that this same ambiguity can be found with respect to Russian politics, if we read exclusively the political texts or exclusively the literary texts. However, this ambiguity can very often be removed and clarified by a parallel reading of the purely political and poetic-political texts.

2.1. The Russo-Japanese War

In 1905, three weeks after the ultimate defeat of Russia by Japan in the Russo-Japanese War, Pessoa's most famous English heteronym, Alexander Search, wrote two sonnets called "To England" (1905). In that conflict, Britain sided with Japan against Russia, its adversary in the larger contest for Central Asia known as the "Great Game." The title would suggest the raising of a toast to England, a praise or a tribute, but in fact the reverse is true; the subtitle, "when English journalists joked on Russia's disasters" reveals the genuine topic of the poem: the pleasure taken by one nation in the difficulties of another.

TO ENGLAND

(when English journalists joked on Russia's disasters)

I

How long, oh Lord, shall war and strife be rolled
On the God-breathing breast of slumbering man,

Horrible nightmares in the doubtful span
Of his sleep blind to heaven? As of old,

Shall we, more wise, in frantic joy behold⁹
The bloody fall of nation and of clan,
And ever others' woes with rough glee scan,
And war's dark names in Glory's charts inscrolled?

We now that in vile joy our egoist fears
Behold dispelled, one day shall mourn the more
That blood of men erased them—bitter tears

Of desolated woe, as wept of yore
(Yet not for the short space of ten long years)
The Grecian archer on the Lemnian shore.

II
Our enemies are fallen; other hands
Than ours have struck them, and our joy is great
To know that now at length our fears abate
From hurt¹⁰ and menace on great Eastern lands.

Bardling, scribbler and artist, servile bands,
From covert sneer outstare their trembling hate,
Laughing at misery, and woe, and fallen state,
Armies of men whole-crushed on desolate strands.

The fallen lion every ass can kick,
That in his life, shamed to unmotioned fright,
His every move with eyes askance did trace.

Ill scorn beseems us, men for war and trick,
Whose groanings nation poured her fullest might
To take the freedom of a farmer race.

(PESSOA, 1995: 52; BNP/E3, 77-79^r e 80^r; cf. PESSOA, 1997: 302-303)

Speaking in the first person plural, the poet begins with an appeal to God, asking him why this constant succession of wars has to take place, why people seem to prefer sleeping with nightmares rather than dreaming of heaven—and how it is that “we” rejoice in others’ pain and death. Both sonnets consist in a rebuke of *schadenfreude*, and in particular of the “vile joy” felt by Englishmen at the “bloody fall” of their Russian enemies, struck by “other hands” than theirs. The poet warns of the “frantic joy” and the alleviation of “egoist fears,” as well as of the evanescence of feelings of safety and power. They will have to pay with “bitter tears” for their

⁹ On the critical edition, we can read the verse without the comma: “Shall we more wise, in frantic joy behold” (PESSOA, 1997: 302).

¹⁰ On the critical edition we can read “hint” (PESSOA, 1997: 303).

“laughing at misery and woe” of “armies of men whole-crushed on desolate strands.” The comparison of the fallen Russians with “the Grecian archer on the Lemnian shore” suggests the former might meet the same fate as Philoctetes: they might be transformed from miserable abandoned beasts on a shore into providential heroes, in the same way that ten years after Philoctetes was abandoned by the Greeks on an island, they came back for him, realizing that their victory over Troy could be achieved only with his help and that of his precious bow. The use of the symbol of the lion to designate Russia (confusing at first, since during the Great Game cartoonists represented Russia as a bear and England as a lion), reinforces the interpretation of a possible inversion of the various power positions of the two nations; the image of Russia as a “fallen lion” could well indicate that the fall of the real lion, Britain, could occur one day, too. Britain, as we know, did not fall, but did have to ally itself with Russia during the First World War, just as Odysseus and the Greeks had to ask for Philoctetes’ help in the Trojan War. In this poem, Search-Pessoa expresses a foreboding about the important future role that Russia could play in Europe, and his confidence in the path that country might take. At the same time, the poet openly shows his disapproval of England’s scorn, its feelings of superiority and colonial instincts towards less Occidentalized countries, which very often took the form of depriving other people of their freedom—as in the then recent Second Boer War from 1899 to 1902, alluded to in the very last tercet of the poem, where Englishmen are designated as “men for war and trick,” who poured their fullest might “to take the freedom of a farmer race” (*boer* meaning “farmer” in Dutch).

2.2. Anarchism in all its forms: Kropotkin (1842–1921) and “The Banker”

In the same group of early English political poems, we find one poem of 1907, still unpublished in Pessoa’s work, but which can be found in an article by Carlos Pittella (PITTELLA, 2016: 49; 61-62), and dedicated to Piotr Kropotkin, the famous Russian political scientist and philosopher of anarchism. Pessoa was certainly already acquainted with Kropotkin’s ideas a few years before writing the poem, since, if we are to believe one of his later notes, he viewed himself as an anarchist at a certain point of his adolescence: “J’ai été anarchiste aux (sic!) 17 ans” (PESSOA, 2006b: 195). Kropotkin’s most famous book, *La Conquête du pain* (1892), written in French, was at that time the first extensive theory of anarchism. The concept expressed in it, however, was slightly different from what was understood as anarchism up to that time. Instead of being a “collectivist anarchism,” it was defined as a “communist” one; its motto was no longer “to each according to his labor,” as with Bakunin, but “to each according to his needs”; no more competition, but only cooperation. Unlike Marxist communism, this anarchist ideology, also termed “libertarian communism,” is based upon the idea that the free association of people can be achieved directly as

a result of the abolition of the state without passing through the dictatorship of the proletariat.

As mentioned by Pittella, the title of the poem, “Kropotkine, C[onquista] del Pan,” shows that Pessoa had read Kropotkin’s books in a Spanish translation.

Kropotkine C[onquista] del Pan

Dreams, idle dreams! yet happy who can have
 Such things existence’ things to substitute!
 Who sums not life into a flowering grave
 Nor locks his good in fame & in repute.
 Happy so firm to dream & to believe
 That on the soil of earth good can take root
 Nor know that joys or pains can make to grieve
 And Venus’ self was born a prostitute.
 Happy incognisant to dream progress
 Nor know in life a fermentation huge
 Whose psychis is volition feeling thought
 A vision changing like its shadowy bliss
 That doth the sight with many forms deluge:
 A plant a cell a leaf a body rot.¹¹

This poem begins with motifs similar to those in “To England,” but reversed: in the two sonnets previously analyzed, the tone was from the outset lugubrious, speaking of the “horrible nightmares” of the slumbering men who do not care about evil, and was a supplication to God to stop war. Here, the atmosphere of the poem on Kropotkin is rather light—it is one of “dreams, idle dreams,” an expression followed by the repeated formula of “‘Happy’ *plus designation*” which “evokes the language of the ‘Beatitudes’ from Jesus’ ‘Sermon on the Mount’” (PITTELLA, 2016: 50). Nevertheless, the continuation of the poem after the repeated “happy” *plus designation*, allows one, I believe, to see the poet as more mocking than “overall positive” (PITTELLA, 2016: 50). Kropotkin is described as somebody who does not really understand the world around him as it is, but lives in his own dreamworld: he believes that “on the soil of earth good can take root”, whereas Venus herself is a whore; he has no care for his reputation but simply acts according to his own volition, feelings, and thoughts. The use of the word “*psychis*” is undoubtedly a reflection of Pessoa’s reading of medical texts, which we have seen began to interest him at this time. The mockery of one such as Kropotkin, who wants at all costs to do good without considering the real conditions and real needs of the people, may even come from Nordau, whom Pessoa was reading at about the same time (May 1907), and who is known to have considered this type of “benevolent” individual as

¹¹ There is a variant of the last verse, as we can see in the picture of the manuscript in PITTELLA’s article (2016: 49), “A plant, a worm, a brain, a body, rot.”

“degenerate” —as in his already mentioned assessment of Tolstoy, who himself, it should be noted, strongly influenced Kropotkin. As a result, Kropotkin appears as a naïf, who cannot see the “worm” under the “plants” and the “leaves”, nor the “rot” in the “bodies”; by his faith in humanity, he risks indiscriminately excusing the worst by setting them free.

In Pessoa’s library, there is a book by Émile Faguet on socialism from 1907, which Pessoa might have read at that time. Whether or not this is so, it is interesting that a sentence underlined by him in that text could be illustrative of his poem: “L’anarchisme est une erreur sociologique fondée sur une ignorance psychologique stupéfiante” (FAGUET, 1907: 170) [*Anarchism is a sociological error based on an astounding psychological ignorance*]. In any event, going through life as an overly trusting altruist seems to Pessoa no more useful than going through it as a selfish man rejoicing in the misfortune of others. At this point, Pessoa had clearly abandoned what anarchistic convictions he had held, if any, perhaps thanks to his newfound knowledge of psychology and medicine—although some sympathy for this ideology on his part is still palpable.

Many years later, in 1922, after having gone through the detour of a period of reflection on communism (to which we will return), Pessoa once again places an anarchist in his literary work—no longer in a poem about a real anarchist, but in a short story about a fictional one. In *O Banqueiro Anarquista* [*The Anarchist Banker*], he recounts with humor how a rich banker, through tortuous, but seemingly logical, reasoning, manages to convince his interlocutor that he is the very paradigm of the accomplished anarchist. Some of the ideas outlined by the banker at the beginning of his argument come straight from the anarcho-communism of Kropotkin. Like the latter, the banker holds freedom to be the highest of values; that social fictions such as the power of money, social position or other “fake” authority must be eliminated; and that it will be necessary to make a leap from the bourgeois regime to that of a free society without the transition through the dictatorship of the proletariat. Not, however, being “a saint”¹² and as selfless as Kropotkin and Tolstoy (PESSOA, 2013a: 106), but of the belief that solidarity is no more natural than the state, money, or social position, the banker has been content, together with a few like-minded people, to work at the level of the idea and to prepare society for freedom through active anarchist propaganda, rather than part with anything more tangible in constructing a new world.

This experience allowed the banker to convince himself that working together always leads to tyranny, with or without social fictions; there are always, he states, some people who end up governing others, even among anarchists.

¹² Antero de Quental, in his correspondence already alluded to, and calling Tolstoy “mad,” recognizes at the same time that he also “a saint.” See: QUENTAL (1989: 925).

Um grupo pequeno [...] estabelecido e unido expressamente para trabalhar pela causa da liberdade, tinha, no fim de uns meses, conseguido só uma coisa de positivo e concreto – a criação entre si de tirania [...]. Era, ainda por cima, tirania exercida entre si por gente cujo intuito sincero não era senão destruir tirania e criar liberdade.

(PESSOA, 1999: 40-41)

[A small group (...) established and united expressly to work for the cause of freedom, had, at the end of a few months, achieved only one positive and concrete thing - the creation of tyranny among themselves (...). It was, moreover, tyranny exercised among themselves by people whose sincere intention was nothing more than to destroy tyranny and create freedom.]

On this point, his perspective seems to coincide with that of Pessoa, for whom an application of the principles of equality and fraternity are simply impossible (PESSOA, 1979a: 114–115; BNP/E3, 55-84^r e 84^v). The conclusions drawn by the banker are clearly the result of an ironic intellectual shell-game between Pessoa and his character: according to the banker, one is free only when working alone, subordinating social conventions and their uses to one's own ends. Money being the overriding social fiction, the anarchist has figured out that the only way to fight it is to earn enough of it (by becoming a banker) and, by this means, no longer to feel its influence, to be completely free of this fiction. If everyone were to undertake this approach of "commercial anarchism," the world would be free.... The banker is here, of course, in no way a spokesman for Pessoa,¹³ as his conclusion is entirely at odds with Pessoa's own ascetic impulses and lifestyle. The poet has freed himself from the fiction of money, not by accumulating it but, on the contrary, by having the barest means of support—freedom meant for him the liberty to devote himself to writing.

2.3. Communism and Lenin

If anarchism is neither strongly condemned nor condoned by Pessoa, and even treated humorously in places by him, his views on socialism and communism are decidedly negative—despite possessing books and brochures in his private library

¹³ As he says himself (PESSOA, 1966: 105; BNP/E3, 16-60^r): "Nestes desdobramentos de personalidade ou, antes, invenções de personalidades diferentes, há dois graus ou tipos, que estarão revelados ao leitor, se os seguiu, por características distintas. No primeiro grau, a personalidade distingue-se por ideias e sentimentos próprios, distintos dos meus, assim como, em mais baixo nível desse grau, se distingue por ideias, postas em raciocínio ou argumento, que não são minhas, ou, se o são, o não conheço. O *Banqueiro Anarquista* é um exemplo deste grau inferior; o *Livro do Desassossego* e a personagem Bernardo Soares são o grau superior." [In these personality developments, or rather, inventions of different personalities, there are two degrees or types, which will be revealed to the reader, if he has followed them, by distinct characteristics. In the first degree, the personality distinguishes oneself by ideas and feelings of its own, distinct from mine, as well as, at the lowest level of that degree, it is distinguished by ideas, put into reasoning or argument, which are not mine, or, if they are, I do not know them. The "Anarchist Banker" is an example of this lower degree; the "Book of Disquiet" and the character Bernardo Soares are the higher degree].

that defended these ideologies, the most striking example being the booklet, *A Democracia russa*, which enumerates the benefits and progress brought about in Russia by communism. These readings clearly had little effect on Pessoa, since if there are constants in his political thought, these are definitely anticommunism (anti-bolshevism) and antisocialism (PESSOA, 2014b: 206), terms he treats more or less as synonyms, in both his political and poetic writings. We know from notes dating back to 1920 that Pessoa planned at least two critical essays on Bolshevism: “Ensaio sobre o Bolchevismo” and “5 perguntas aos bolchevistas” (BNP/E3, 144G-98 and 99). Like many of his projects, these essays were never completed, but a number of reflections scattered throughout his work provide a fairly clear idea of his opinion on the subject. The theme that comes through again and again when he evokes the Russian ideologies of the period around 1917 is their blatant contradiction: on the one hand, the Russian revolution is prepared and carried out in the name of equality and freedom; on the other, the ideologies pursued appear in practice to be the very negation of these same principles. These are reactionary phenomena which, in the end, have little to do with social concerns.

Há alguém que, a sério, julgue que a Revolução Russa transformou alguma coisa de fundamental? O Império do Czar vivia em anarquia governativa, em analfabetismo de letras e de energias; crê alguém que o bolchevismo eliminou a anarquia, crê alguém que o bolchevismo eliminou a tirania, crê alguém que o mero aparecimento de uns pobres cérebros românticos a mandar, sem a preparação científica para o pensamento ou para a acção?

(PESSOA, 1979a: 114; BNP/E3, 55-84r).

[Is there anyone who seriously believes that the Russian Revolution has transformed something fundamental? The Czar's Empire lived in government anarchy, in ignorance of letters and energies; does anyone believe that Bolshevism suppressed anarchy, eliminated tyranny, and that the mere appearance of poor romantic brains to control, without scientific preparation for thought or action, could?]

This idea is taken up even more incisively in *The Anarchist Banker*, where the eponymous character—without being, as we have seen, Pessoa's spokesman—takes up such reflections and pursues them to the point of absurdity. Thus, the banker says:

O socialismo e o comunismo baseiam-se na idéa de igualdade, desprezando a da liberdade. São peores tyrannias que o systema burguez, que, ao menos baseando-se no individualismo, sempre se baseia numa coisa que envolve em germen a liberdade [...]. Para que diabo substituir a tyrannia social do systema burguez pela tyrannia de Estado do systema socialista ou do systema comunista?

(PESSOA, 2013a: 101 and 107)

[Socialism and communism are based on the idea of equality, but care little for freedom. These regimes are tyrannies worse than the bourgeois system which, based on individualism, at least contains the seeds of freedom (...). Why on earth should the social tyranny of the bourgeois system be replaced by the tyranny of the state, as in the communist or socialist system?]

Communist Russia reminds him of a Jesuit college whose motto is PERINDE AC CADAVER (the ideal of perfect obedience), but if the Jesuits have the excuse of a world beyond this one, the Communists are Jesuits without such excuses. However, this type of regime suits the Russians, the banker observes, because these people “were born to be slaves” and “have a furious desire to be commanded” (PESSOA, 2013a: 106).

In Pessoa’s political writing in general, Bolshevik, Communist and Socialist ideologies are not for the most part identified with the names of specific leaders, but are generally referred to collectively as “Russian.” The fact remains that in his poetical texts, there is one name directly evoking these political doctrines which intermittently looms up—most of the time without warning, because seemingly with no direct connection to the subject treated: Lenin.

Let us consider the poem “Marcha Fúnebre” [*Funeral March*]: it is clearly dedicated to Portuguese events, but in the middle of the poem the figure of Lenin shows up unexpectedly. What is the meaning of this apparition?

MARCHA FÚNEBRE

Com lixo, dinheiro dos outros, e sangue inocente,
Cercada por assassinos, traidores, ladrões (a salvo)
No seu caixão francês, liberalissimamente,
Em carro puxado por uma burra (a do estado) seu alvo,
[...]
Passa para além do mundo, em uma visão desconforme,
A República Democrática Portuguesa.

O Lenine de capote e lenço,
Afonso anti-Henriques Costa.

Mas o Diabo espantou-se: aqui entram bandidos
Até certo ponto e dentro de certo limite.
Assassinos, sim, mas com uma certa inteligência.
Ladrões, sim, mas capazes de uma certa bondade.
Agora vocês não trazem quem tivesse tido a decência
De ao menos ter uma vez dito a razão ou verdade.

(PESSOA, 1993: 348; BNP/E3, 66C-11¹⁴)

¹⁴ According to Teresa Rita Lopes, the editor of *Pessoa inedito* from where I quote these verses, the poem dates from 1917, but to José Barreto, this seems unlikely, and he is of the opinion that it dates from the late 1920s.

[FUNERAL MARCH

With garbage, other people's money, and innocent blood,
 Surrounded by murderers, traitors, thieves (safe)
 In his French coffin, most liberally,
 In a car pulled by a donkey (the one of the state) your target,
 (...) *Passes beyond the world, in a monstrous vision,*
The Portuguese Democratic Republic.

Lenin in cloak and scarf,
Afonso anti-Henriques Costa.

But the Devil was amazed: here come bandits
To a certain extent and within a certain limit.
Murderers, yes, but with a certain intelligence.
Thieves, yes, but capable of a certain goodness.
Now you don't bring anyone who had the decency
Of having at least once told the reason or the truth.]

The first stanza describes a burial. This description is not only sad, as every funeral may be, but frightening and even disgusting. The coffin, instead of being simply accompanied by mourners, is surrounded by disreputable people such as murderers and traitors. It is pulled by an animal considered inferior: a donkey, and even worse, a female donkey ("burra")—which undermines the funeral's solemnity and seems to indicate that the dead person is of low rank—even if a cryptic parenthetical identifies it as the donkey of the state. Other terms describing this gloomy funeral do not seem to make sense: why should the coffin be French and even if so, why mention it? Could it be for strictly poetic and metrical reasons? Other terms sound ironic, because their exaggeration is obvious, such as the word "liberalissimamente," *in an extreme liberal mode*; if the word "liberal", meaning open, generous and benevolent, has very positive connotations, here it would seem to be out of place, the expression clashes with the marching individuals, murderers and traitors, all of whom are anything but liberal. The superlative adds to the oddity of the scene. The suspense is lifted in the last line of this first stanza: the one lying in the coffin is not just anybody, not even a person, but is said to be the "Portuguese Democratic Republic," passing as a "monstrous vision" to the other world. These words reveal the whole description to be a metaphor—a very strange metaphor if the poem was really written in 1917 as Rita Lopes believes, because it would mean that Pessoa wrote a poem about the death of the Republic at a moment when the Republic was still alive (it lasted until 1926).

This first stanza is followed by two verses completely detached from the rest;¹⁵ they are exactly in the middle of the poem, as if to signify that they are its core. If they are visually isolated as if to give them more weight, they are at the same time completely separate from, and seemingly irrelevant to, the rest of the poem, since they are dedicated to Lenin—a Lenin “in cloak and with handkerchief,” put in apposition to “Afonso anti-Henriques Costa.”

The most logical way to make sense of these lines is to assume that Lenin attended the funeral of the Portuguese Republic, taking his place, by implication, among the assassins and murderers. The handkerchief is mentioned to suggest that he has to wipe his tears, whereas the strange succession of names “Afonso anti-Henriques Costa” is a double hint: both to Afonso Costa, the principal leader of the Republican party, whom Pessoa hated (he even wrote a sarcastic journal article when Costa was involved in an accident), and to Afonso Henriques, the founder of independent Portugal and its first king, and therefore a very positive figure—in his collection of poems, *Mensagem*, Pessoa calls him “pae” [*father*] and asks him to give Portugal his example and his strength: “Dá-nos o exemplo inteiro | E a tua inteira força” (PESSOA, 1988: 48). Lenin is accordingly compared to Afonso Costa but opposed to Afonso Henriques. But why should Lenin be at this funeral? This remains, for the moment, a riddle.

The second and last part, coming after the two detached lines, is a straightforward continuation of the first part, as if the lines on Lenin did not exist. Arriving in hell, the funeral cortège in all its monstrousness appalls even the Devil, who would like to keep it out of his domain¹⁶. Meanness and atrocities have limits even for him: evil has to be committed within the limits of a “certain” intelligence and of certain truths. The cortege exceeded all thinkable and imaginable atrocities.

On a first reading, this poem is a pamphlet against the Portuguese Republic, which governs with the help of murder, betrayal and lies. For the establishment of the Republic, the fall of the monarchy was necessary, and the first step in triggering this fall was the assassination of King Dom Carlos I of Portugal and his son in 1908. Moreover, Pessoa wrote the poem following equally grim events, such as Portugal’s involvement in the First World War (against Germany), and Sidonio Pais’ coup d’état in December 1917 and election as President of the Republic in April 1918, which ushered in a period of repression and torture. But the presence of the two above-mentioned “semantic resistances,” namely Lenin (the most important) and

¹⁵ In PESSOA (1993: 348), there is a note saying that these two verses are separated from the anterior and posterior strophes by a broad indicative space.

¹⁶ The idea of a devil, himself frightened by the acts of a certain regime, surpassing in wickedness everything he had imagined, could well have been taken from Gil Vicente, *O auto da barca do inferno* (1517) [*The Ship of Hell*]. The motif is also recurrent in “literatura de cordel” [*cordel literature*]. We find it, for example, nowadays in the poem by the Brazilian Valberlúcio de Teixeira “O dia em que o diabo sentiu inveja do capitão Bolsonaro” [*The Day the Devil felt Envy Towards Captain Bolsonaro*].

the “French coffin,” pushes us to explore further layers of meaning. For this, Pessoa’s political texts written exactly at the same time and treating the same topic can help us. The text “Os grandes movimentos revolucionários” (1918) [*The Major Revolutionary Movements*], which analyzes the causes and consequences of revolutions, is particularly enlightening. Revolutions, claims Pessoa in this theoretical piece, start generally from a clear sense of injustice. For an injustice to lead to revolt it is not enough for it to exist; the prerequisite is that the population has lost faith in the authority of the regime in place, which they perceive as “disorganized” and unresponsive to their needs. This much seems obvious. But the problem, according to Pessoa, is that if the country was badly governed before the revolution, the revolution will render this disorganization even worse—such is the law of historical continuity. And he gives three examples: first, of course, the example of Portugal, with the passage from the monarchy of Carlos and Manuel II to the Portuguese Republic. But he adds two more instances taken from other countries: from the Ancien Regime to the terror in France, and from Tsarism to Bolshevism in Russia. In all three cases, the revolution each time brought a worsening of the situation and paved the way for a new form of dictatorship:

Visando o estabelecimento da liberdade, a Revolução Francesa suprimiu-a toda; inverteu os termos da opressão, nada mais. Visando a liberdade, a libertação dos operários e dos fracos o bolchevismo oprimiu outros fracos e não aos que disse servir desoprimiu. Visando a reformar uma administração corrupta, e subverter uma semitirania política, a República Portuguesa instaurou uma administração mais corrupta ainda, uma semitirania por certo ainda mais opressiva.

(PESSOA, 1980: 258; BNP/E3, 55-65^r)

[Aiming at the establishment of freedom, the French Revolution suppressed it completely; it reversed the terms of oppression, nothing more. Aiming at freedom, at the liberation of the workers and the weak, Bolshevism came to oppress other weak people and did not lift the oppression of those it said it was serving. Aiming to reform a corrupt administration, and to subvert a political semi-tyranny, the Portuguese Republic established an even more corrupt administration, a semi-tyranny that was certainly even more oppressive than the previous one.]

These reflections allow a further, and plausible, interpretation to the poem “Funeral March” and elements of “semantic resistance,” as here we find the same comparative elements. Portuguese events are here too, though in a much more hidden and discreet way, superimposed upon other world events alluded to precisely by the mention of the “French coffin” and “Lenin.” In light of the above-cited critical text, the French coffin can now be understood as a reference to the crimes of the French Revolution, when Louis XVI was guillotined, whereas Lenin obviously embodies the same kind of murder with the assassination of the Tsar and his family in 1918. The Portuguese regicide is simply a repetition of other political murders in history, carried out for identical reasons and supposedly with the goal

of gaining greater equality and liberty for the population. Here, too, the bloody consequences were the same.

History seems to have proven Pessoa correct with regard to contemporary events, namely those in Portugal and Russia: both degenerated into totalitarianism—of the right wing for Portugal with Salazar, of the left wing for Russia and the Soviet Union with Lenin, followed by Stalin. From the 1930s onwards, Pessoa puts these movements on the same level since they both disavowed human dignity and stood against the ideals of modern European civilization:

Soviètes, comunismo, fascismo, nacional-socialismo – tudo isso é o mesmo facto, o predomínio da espécie, isto é, dos baixos instintos, que são de todos, contra a inteligência, que é do indivíduo só.

(PESSOA, 2015b: 215; BNP/E3, 55B-5^r)

[Soviets, communism, fascism, national-socialism – all this is the same thing, the predominance of the species, that is, of low instincts, which belong to everyone, against intelligence, which belongs to the individual only.]

In a letter of January 1934 to the director of the journal *A Voz*, he writes that Hitlerism, Fascism and Bolshevism are the triple offspring of the Anti-Christ (PESSOA, 1993: 327; BNP/E3, 114³-65 e 66). He no longer hesitated, in his theoretical writings, to write down the names of the leaders of these totalitarian regimes, as shown in the draft of a project in which he planned to compare some dictators of the extreme right and of the extreme left during the 1930s:

DICTATORSHIP. Study of Staline (or Lenine), Mussolini, Salazar. Common points (1) materialism, (2) anti-individualism, (3) ◇ Circenses sine pane. (Hitler, Salazar)

(PESSOA, 2015b: 211; BNP/E3, 92E-55^r)

Politically, therefore, it seems that Pessoa, without having ever made the Slavic world his main focus of attention, initially felt a certain sympathy, or at least a certain compassion, towards Russia's misfortunes. Like a number of Portuguese intellectuals, he even expected that Russia, with its high spirituality, would have something to teach Europe and that the continent had to be ready, should the wheel of fortune turn in Russia's favor (cf. the two sonnets "To England"). Nevertheless, the rise of Bolshevism, the Revolution of 1917, and the subsequent adoption of communism quickly dispelled these thoughts. During World War I, for example, Pessoa's heteronym the philosopher António Mora sees the inversion of power positions between England and Russia, prophesized by Alexander Search in "To England," as being very near, but describes it in opposite terms: he has no more compassion for Russia, defined here as "forças bárbaras e fortes" (PESSOA, 2013c: 204; BNP/E3, 12¹-21^v) [*barbarian and strong forces*], but feels very much concerned about England fighting at Russia's side and thereby bringing England to ruin:

Mas facilitando a expansão da Rússia, [...] não estará [a Inglaterra] sacrificando aos seus interesses de amanhã os seus interesses do dia depois? Para a Inglaterra a Rússia não é um perigo? [...] Não estão [os ingleses], afinal auxiliando a Rússia, que os há-de matar?

(PESSOA, 2013c: 211–212; BNP/E3, 12¹-19^r e 79^r)

[But by facilitating Russia's expansion (...) will [England] not be sacrificing its interests in the long run to its interests of tomorrow? Isn't Russia a danger to England? (...) Aren't [the English], after all, helping Russia, which will kill them?]

In any event, be it through his own authorship or that of his heteronyms' theoretical texts, a deep contempt came to replace Pessoa's initial good will towards Russia—a contempt for the “incompêtença pavorosa” [*dreadful incompetence*] of Russia's new leaders (principally Lenin), “totalmente destituídos de cultura científica e moderna, cérebros românticos sem noção nenhuma das realidades práticas” (PESSOA, 1980: 50; BNP/E3, 55-85 e 86) [*totally deprived of modern and scientific culture and characterized by a failure to grasp practical realities*].

3. Conclusion

With his exceptional intellectual curiosity and a mindset naturally inclined towards comparisons, Pessoa could not fail to be interested in Russia, its politics and culture. Moreover, the whole of Portugal began to open up to Russia in the second half of the nineteenth century, due in large part to the publication of the first works of synthesis on Russian culture in Portuguese (mainly *Quadros da Literatura, da Ciência e das Artes na Rússia* by Vakcel) and to travel accounts and chronicles by three Portuguese intellectuals about their stay in Russia (see above). Russia was systematically presented in these writings as a country where multiple religions, peoples and cultures coexisted—a feature that likely appealed to Pessoa's intrinsically cosmopolitan streak, and to his aim as an author to create “a cosmopolitan art in time and space” (PESSOA, 2015a: 115). Pessoa's private library also bears witness to the fact that he had acquired a number of books on the topic. In the course of our analysis, we were able to identify a certain number of more precise points of commonality between the problems posed by Russian culture and Pessoa's personal concerns.

The discovery of Russian literature by the Portuguese sometimes aroused fascination, sometimes incomprehension in the face of the complexity and psychological depth of contemporary Russian novels, and it was not uncommon for their authors to be labelled mad. In any case, this was the opinion of the most famous writer of the Coimbra generation, Antero de Quental, who, in line with Nordau, not only emphasized the overstimulated imaginations and sickly nervousness of these writers, but also accused the readers infatuated with these works of fatigue and instability. Since becoming interested in the relationship between literature and

madness from 1907 onwards, Pessoa encountered in his studies the great names of Russian literature. This literature dealt with topics dear to him, such as the representation of common people and vagrants, at a time when the rest of European literature still remained very aristocratic in its focus and its traditions (cf. decadent literature) and placed more emphasis on aesthetic than on philosophical or moral criteria.

As regards the political situation in Russia, Pessoa was also sensitive to certain similarities with Portugal: both countries are situated on the fringes of Europe, and both were struggling with economic and industrial backwardness and social stagnation. For both countries, the entry into modernity came at the price of great civil violence: the regicide in Portugal leading to the fall of the monarchy, and the revolutions of 1905 and 1917 in Russia leading to the fall of tsarism.

In the light of all these elements, it is therefore not surprising that in Pessoa's notes one finds references to projects on Russian literature and politics. His notes on madness and genius reveal that Dostoevsky's works played an important role in his study, while in other notebooks with more political content, one also finds notes for projects on Bolshevism, Trotsky, and Lenin.

Why were these projects not pursued? Would they have been realized if Pessoa had lived longer? Why, in spite of Pessoa's identification of these common points, does Russia, both culturally and politically, occupy in total so little space in his literary as well as theoretical work? The allusions to Russia, as we have seen, do exist, but they are extremely scattered, poorly developed, and most often formulated in a brutal, negative way, and in a tone that brooks no reply. While a partial explanation may be attributed to Pessoa's inability to read the Russian original texts, there are other, much more decisive reasons that may explain this relative silence.

The first is that the affinities he perceived between the two countries concerned aspects that frightened him. We know how concerned he was over the possibility of losing his mind; more broadly, we also know how much he disliked violent and dictatorial regimes. In its literature and politics, Russia could have appeared to him as a huge mirror that enlarged and multiplied those aspects of Portugal and of himself that he wished to repress. Secondly, he certainly developed at the same time a sense of rivalry for a country that, like Portugal, was on the margins of Europe; the Russian empire, immense and powerful, reminded him of the empire that Portugal was no longer. The presentiment shared by many European intellectuals from the most diverse fields that Russia could well become the master of Europe,¹⁷ initially aroused in him a certain positive expectation (expressed

¹⁷ This idea was perhaps first raised by the philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder: in *Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1791), he devotes a few pages to the Slavs and, after recalling the sufferings of these peoples despite what he characterized as their gentle and honest character, formulates the conviction that the wheel of time will turn in their favor. The politic Alexis de Tocqueville expresses a similar idea in *Democracy in America* (1835), where he claims that there will be two great nations in

through the compassion felt for Russia by the heteronym Alexander Search in “To England” and the warning to England of fortune’s ever-turning wheel), but this expectation was to be disappointed, with the partial realization of this foreboding increasingly taking the form of Socialism and Bolshevism and culminating in Communism and the Soviet Union.

He believed that Bolsheviks and Communists were sectarians, “*crístãos sem religião; têm a mentalidade cristã, acreditam no milagre, porque julgam que uma sociedade se transforma de um dia para o outro*” (PESSOA, 1979a: 114; BNP/E3, 55-84^r) [*Christians without religion; they have a Christian mentality, they believe in miracles, because they think that a society can be transformed overnight*]. They rely on a false mysticism, the mysticism of miracles that work demagogically because “*O milagre é o que o povo quer, é o que o povo compreende. Que o faça Nossa Senhora de Lourdes ou de Fátima, ou que o faça Lenine*” (PESSOA, 1980: 266; BNP/E3, 55G-96^r) [*the miracle is what the people want, it is what the people understand. May Our Lady of Lourdes or Fatima do it, or may Lenin do it*]. But the miracle cuts off tradition, whereas the real way to change the world is to work within tradition, developing something new out of tradition. “*A verdadeira novidade que perdure é a que toma todos os fios da tradição e os tece novamente num padrão que a tradição seria incapaz de criar*” (PESSOA, 2000: 168–169 and 91) [*The real novelty that endures is the one that has taken up all the threads of tradition and woven them again into a pattern that tradition could not itself weave*].

This is what Pessoa will try to do later in his career by developing a mysticism based on tradition, in particular by reviving the legend of Sebastianism—that is, the belief that King Sebastian, who disappeared in the Battle of Alcácer Quibir in 1578, will return to Portugal and establish the Fifth Empire of the World. “The one great act of Portuguese history (that long, cautious, scientific period of the Discoveries) is the one great cosmopolitan act in history” (PESSOA, 2009: 218; 2015a: 132). The Portuguese, by nature cosmopolitans, never lived only within the confines of a single personality, nation, or belief, which is why, he believed, it would be their role to be at the head of this future Empire. “*Ninguém – nem mesmo o russo – é como o portuguez temperamentalmente desnacionalizado, aberto a todas as influencias, recebedor facil de todas as novidades*” (PESSOA, 2009: 77). The cosmopolitan World of the future would not be led by Slavs, but by the Portuguese.

the world, the Russians and the Americans, and that “each of them seems to be marked out by the will of Heaven to sway the destinies of half the globe.” At the close of the nineteenth century, Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé’s book *Le Roman russe* (VOGÜÉ, 1971) is permeated by the idea that Russia will be able to help Europe overcome its spiritual and cultural crisis, whereas the poet Antero de Quental writes that Russia is a nation destined to exert a decisive influence on future civilization—but that he does not look forward to it because it will mean at the same time the destruction of the modern spirit (QUENTAL, 1989: 918).

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