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Oneiric Fascism. The Political Economy of Fernando Pessoa

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ABSTRACT

Poet Fernando Pessoa (1888–1935), Portugal's literary glory, is also known to have penned a not inconsiderable corpus of sociological and politological reflections. This essay collates all such original material and glosses it with a view to uncovering Pessoa's religious true colours, and by so doing, goes on to argue that it is no accident, poetics aside, that western cultural intelligentsia finds it expedient to promote the literary output of personages like Pessoa who, in one form or another, preach an ultra-conservative gospel. Though he is not typically recognised as a thinker of the Right at all, the article's thesis is that Pessoa not only cuts a "fascist" figure in the conventional (Leftist) tenor of the epithet, but that the category itself of Fascism ought to be torn off its historical (pro-Liberal) contextualisation and radically reformulated as the default entomological categorisation of modern forms of society, and turned thereby into the norm against which exceptions need be counted, not the other way around. In light of this paradigmatic shift, Pessoa's considerations on selfishness, patriotism, and social dynamics afford an ulterior revelation of the anti-compassionate agenda of a type of System, ours, so keen on promoting thinkers of his ilk.

Keywords: Postmodernism; Portugal; Jünger; Bataille; Veblen; gnosis; myth; libertarian economics; patriotism; fascism; anarchism; Italy

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ОРИГИНАЛЬНАЯ СТАТЬЯ

Онейрический фашизм, или политическая экономика Фернандо Пессоа

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АННОТАЦИЯ

Предметом статьи является анализ взглядов поэта Фернандо Пессоа (1888–1935), литературной гордости Португалии, также широко известного как автора многочисленных социологических, политологических, культурологических и политэкономических размышлений и статей, проповедующих его консервативные взгляды, в которых просматриваются истоки скрытого, ползучего фашизма. Методологической основой данного исследования являются сопоставление и анализ научных трудов Пессоа. Автор, раскрывая истинную религиозную окраску социального творчества португальского поэта, приходит к выводу, что не случайно (оставляя поэзию в стороне) западная культурная интеллигенция считает целесообразным продвигать литературную продукцию таких персонажей, которые в той или иной форме проповедуют ультраконсерватизм. Поскольку Пессоа не считается мыслителем правого толка, а представляет собой «фашистскую» фигуру в общепринятом (левом) смысле, по мнению автора, сама категория фашизма должна быть лишена своей исторической контекстуализации и радикально переформулирована в соответствии со стандартной энтомологической категоризацией современных форм общества, т. е. преобразована в норму, по отношению к которой нужно рассматривать исключения, а не наоборот. С учетом этого парадигматического сдвига автор делает вывод, что соображения Пессоа об эгоизме, патриотизме и социальной динамике позволяют в конечном счете вскрыть истинные причины и механизмы существующего порядка социальной системы, заинтересованной в продвижении подобных мыслителей.

Ключевые слова: постмодернизм; Португалия; Юнгер; Батай; Веблен; гнозис; миф; либертарианская экономика; патриотизм; фашизм; анархизм; Италия

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Introductory: A Dreamy Variant of “Right-wing Postmodernism”

“Coca-Cola: Primeiro estranha-se, Depois entranha-se.”
 (“Coca-Cola: First it dazzles, thereafter you guzzle.”)
 Advertising slogan coined by Pessoa (≈1927–28).¹

- Who is this individual?
- Someone, sort of...—the butler, hesitated.
- But dressed how? Well dressed?
- No sir, but he is not a proletarian or a vulgar type.
- All right, let him in.

Pessoa, *The Purloined Parchment*.²

“All is religion,” said Fernando Pessoa (1888–1935), Portugal’s literary hero of the early XXth century.

Pessoa, whose poetry and prose constitute already a subject of vast, established scholarly speculation, is a fascinating character in his own right; a character, furthermore, that should be of interest to students of political economy and political philosophy considering that he had also devoted attention to socio-political issues managing, with the incisiveness that is a poet’s trademark, to commit to paper a number of noteworthy insights.

Though he has even been labelled by some as one of the “villains” of the twentieth century (Pasi, 2001),³ Pessoa, in European intellectual circles, figures prominently as an icon jealously appropriated by Leftist *bienpensants*, who revere him as some kind of progressive anti-modern rebel, as an existential victim of the Second Industrial Divide and the philistine squalor of the belle époque.

My contention is that he is nothing of the sort. Perhaps more of a “villain” than a progressive critic (it is precisely his “villainy” that is anatomised here), I rather see him as a high-class devotee of that peculiar church I refer to as “Neo-Gnosticism.” By the latter, I mean a modern re-elaboration of anti-Christian gnosis — i.e., of a creed that may be preliminarily construed as “a dualistic transcendent religion of salvation” (Jonas, 1963). The *political* companion to this religious outlook is one of undeviating *conservatism*. In the conservative outlook, the Law of Nature — which could be impressionistically construed as one of perennial

violence and warfare originated by Chance and intervalled by the truce of procreation and nurture — is taken to be immutable; it is regarded as something more poised and cogent than the auto-suggestive, quasi-hysterical delusion that, because we are endowed with (very circumscribed) nurturing bents, there may be space in our mental apparatus for a belief in “the good”—i.e., that very belief in virtuous steadfastness, which the Marquis de Sade had taken immense pleasure in beleaguering, flushing out, and triumphantly skewering to death in each of his vignettes.

For Neo-Gnostics and their post-modern epigones, this world of ours is a cosmic imbroglio. As they see it, before the advent of modernity’s mechanisation, humans were wont to cluster around a “core of sacredness”—i.e., around a liturgical array of laws and customs issuing from imperialist centrals manned by priests and warriors whose task it was to ride like a restless wave the masses’ insuppressible craving for blood, orgiastic frenzy and slaughter—all of which were to be dispatched in ritual fashion through endless cycles of wars, mass sacrifice, and festive subversion of taboos. The unannounced and inexplicable advent of mechanised life, accompanied by the industrial whirring of the new machines, the omnipresent pecuniary appraisal of all things, and the ghastly and self-righteous kitsch of a new spirit—that of *bourgeoisie*—, is recorded as a cosmogonic alteration of the old order, an intolerable usurpation of the ancient heroics of blood, war, and sovereignty.

In the last analysis, the issue is one of ethos. If these are the beliefs of the “religious pessimist,” if his rejection of modernity is complete, how is he, then, going to deport himself, toil, and survive in the corporate and ministerial strictures of the Techno-Structure? It is before such a question that the post-modern camp sunders into two seemingly adversarial postures: either one sides with “the machine,” carving a niche amongst the technocrats, i.e., sharing power, with opportunistic (“stoic”) detachment, though never at the highest levels so as to maintain enough distance whence to enjoy the spectacle should it all go up in flames at some juncture. So, either stoic compromise or insubordination: viz., insubordination by fomenting rage against the machine, while (condescendingly and manipulatively) taking the side of society’s rejects — paupers, crazies, perverts, and criminals — in whom the Neo-Gnostic aristocrat

¹ Pessoa (2000, p. 13). Starting in 1925, Pessoa also worked in advertising, promoting products, and creating slogans such as the one cited.

² Pessoa (2009).

³ See Brunello Cusati’s introduction to Pessoa (1996, p. 12.).

recognises the kingless, latter-day descendants of those sovereign mobs of yore that had clamoured for the pageantry of torture, witch-burning, executions, and the holocaust, in whichever form the reigning office would grant it to them. We may label the former pose as “Right-wing” and the latter as “Left-wing” postmodernism.”⁴ But this separation of roles is functional, rather than visceral: for as much as each faction may claim to loathe the other, the two are, together, discursive complements in a game of propagandistic suggestion designed to weaken and disable in us any drive seeking to rewire the conative substratum of the will and harness it to the prioritising directives of our instinct of compassionateness.

Fernando Pessoa, for his part, appears to possess all the distinctive traits of the post-modern avatar: the originality of a gifted wordsmith; the sullen hatred for modern times; the religiously adversarial scorn for Christianity; and the unconcealed pretension to be pouring that scorn from the higher echelons of esoteric, initiatic knowledge. A post-modern, thus, but of the Right. Pessoa’s impatience with the beck of altruism manifests itself in a medley of attitudes that, in fact, compose the mosaic of the dyed-in-the-wool conservative: viz., the devotion to the aristocracy and the concomitant contempt for the masses, the belief in the recourse to military dictatorship to “protect” the social order, and the constant apologia for authoritarian rule, be it guaranteed by the sword as in the lamented past and/or by rentier privilege as it goes in the Economic Age.

A stroll through Pessoa’s poetic garden is an odd experience. At first, one is chiefly occupied with the smell of defeatist introspections on the futility of life; soft truths are spoken: it is a gentle invitation from a poet purportedly so noncommittal that to decline would be a crime; yet soon, a veil of morbid dissatisfaction darkens the field of vision, and concatenations of bitter aphorisms pull the reader into the windowless chambers of inappetent wakefulness; it is there you think you see the poet seated, three paces away, in the penumbra, his despondence turning into desistance — desistance into misanthropy and misanthropy into combative heresy.

Formerly an “exception to no rule,” a “stagnater of life” (Pessoa, 1998, p. 226), Pessoa comes to reinvent himself as a “sullen strategist,” who, deep down, is a Knight of Portugal not truly intent on “mapping out the details of his inevitable retreat” (Pessoa, 2001, p. 283), but on leading, instead, the “Paracletian Church” against the Vatican. In the autobiographical sketch of 1935, he conclusively defined his political orientation as that of “an English-style Conservative, that is, a Liberal within conservatism, and absolutely anti-reactionary.” “Anti-Communist and antisocialist,” he saw himself committed to promoting “a mystical nationalism, free from any Roman-Catholic infiltration” (Pessoa, 1994, p. 50).

Splendid.

But what does it all mean?

Let us start from the common ground by reviewing some conventional labels: a “Right-winger” (as a self-proclaimed anti-Communist) and a “villain”? Can we “package” poetic output as iridescent and elusive a Pessoa’s in rubrics as vulgar these? If by “Right-wing villain” we mean an individual who harbours no hope in the redeeming force and powerful redress of benevolence and social justice, and who does not believe in equality, but rather in the un-progressive rehabilitation of traditionalist forms of social equilibrium predicated on a “slave-system” managed by a pecuniary aristocracy, then the question ought to be answered in the affirmative. As I shall argue, save for a number of contradictory assertions, Pessoa’s politics overall conforms to this summary description. This becomes patent through a comprehensive illustration of his sociology, whose interpretative power is in any case remarkable — as shown, for instance, by the most elegant account, it offers of Italy’s political experience over the last fifty years (see the conclusive section, “social dynamics”).

Neo-Gnostics are creatures of modernity — minds prone to over-intellectualise what they perceive as the Cosmos’s imperfection. While all Neo-Gnostics surrender to the inevitable violence of “the law of nature,” they do not all vote alike. As said, they tend to divide themselves into two camps: on one side, a leftist, rebellious phalanx, which reveres transgression and throws its lot with the marginalised souls of society, *yet never in the name of universal values*, and, on the other, a nostalgic formation, which laments the dawn

⁴ For an exploration of the adversarial camps of postmodernism, especially the conservative one, see the work of Shadia B. Drury, in particular Drury (1994).

of the knightly aristocracy and sacred violence, and which, for lack of a valid surrogate, aligns itself with authority more or less earnestly. The authority is that of the Liberal State, which *all of them* deplore as that late social catastrophe that has made a shambles of the ancient “sovereign” kingdoms.

What I designate as “classic” post-modern (Neo-Gnostic) thought has produced some of the most lucid analyses of the contemporary power structure. The respective Left-wing and Right-wing *capiscuola* of “classic” anti-modernism is Georges Bataille (1897–1962) and Ernst Jünger (1897–1998);⁵ the twain, in my view, unlike their epigones, have penned genuinely scientific sociology. On the left, Bataille has inspired the whole of France’s (overall valueless) anti-humanist school (the Foucauldians, the French *philosophes*, and their late American acolytes); whereas the luminaries of post-modern conservatism are mostly drawn from the ranks of former Nazi sympathisers such as Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) and Jünger himself,⁶ and to a minor degree, Carl Schmitt (1888–1985) (Preparata, 2012). In spirit, the politics of the latter group are affine to Pessoa’s.

Irrespectively of the Spartacist or fascistoid fragrances, it may be scented with so-called post-modern discourse is typically presented as a jaded and jaundiced dressing-down of the modern *Zeitgeist*, which aesthetes-impresarios peddle as the artistic testimonies of enlightened sceptics, and which eventually the intelligentsia disingenuously plugs as a valuable material for constructive insight — when, in fact, the message of all these tracts is unequivocally one of submission to the Law of Violence. This sort of output carries inherently a destructive message, not a constructive one: on the Left, the “rebels” agitate for ceaseless and issueless strife, while the “fascists,” upholding a like veneration for the fire and blood of eternal conflict, intone varying hymns to the sacrosanct impunity of El Jefe (or los jefes of modern “democracies”). Its insidious-

ness ultimately lies in its solemn acquiescence to the law of parasitical bleeding (of the lower castes by the upper one) and to a hypostatisation of (aboriginal) *enmity* as an irreducible principle of evolved living. Why it pays for the System to publicise these authors among its middle ranks is obvious: this literature suggests 1) that living off the (banking) grid is unthinkable: viz., the apparatus of *authority*, however, fashioned, is the placenta, bittersweet as it may taste, and, therefore, everyone must latch onto privilege as far and as pervicaciously as possible; it further intimates 2) that a brutified underclass is an insuppressible fact of Life and, as such, that it should be properly bled and herded in its proper place, either by blandishment, differentiated narcotisation, and/or by channelling whatever residual force of aggression it may possess after a day’s work against domestic rivals (vs sub-proletarian contenders, in the name of antagonistic “diversity”) or foreign foes, in war. In sum, the post-modern digest is a *fascist* vademecum by instalments for the cowering middle-class philistine who is uncertain as to what to do with whatever surplus love s/he may left with after the daily obligation to the family: and the intimation is that this surplus—“rightist” or “Leftist as it may be”—ought to fuel allegiance to the principle of authority, to the principle of Power’s *legitimacy*.

Before delving into Pessoa’s political economy, I must ask the reader to follow the discussion through one last digressive, yet fundamental, lemma on a reformulation of the notion of “fascism” (and “fascist”)—a noun and an epithet whose use thus far is prompted not by vituperative tendentiousness or a careless and indecorous urge to harangue but, rather, by a precise taxonomic intent: *fascism* is here re-defined as default and central concept wherewith to reframe the entirety of the socio-political conundrum.

“Fascism” as an All-Embracing, Foundational Politological Category

With Fascism, the problem is, of course, that, since the end of Mussolini’s and Hitler’s regimes, the term has come to encompass all things that, in the perspective of the (Anglo-American) victors, one must regard as unquestionably bad, ugly, and repulsive, socio-politically speaking especially. The demonisation of Fascism is a central buttress in the Liberal catechesis.

⁵ For a systematic framing of this school of thought see Preparata (2007/2011).

⁶ Heidegger, in particular, spawned —and his ghost continues to spawn— legions of admirers both on the Left (e.g., Foucault and Derrida) and the Right, of course (Leo Strauss and the Chicago Neocons). For a detailed discussion of Right-wing postmodernism and its symbiotic relationship with the leftist counterpart, see Preparata (2007/2011), Chapter 8, pp. 135–77.

By reflex, it is designed to elicit in all learners the conviction that by espousing the creed and social tenets of those who defeated historical Fascism, they themselves become ipso facto certified, irreproachable “good folk.” To insult someone, tagging him a “fascist” has always been the instantaneous, standard routine to silence a political opponent and (hopefully) pave the way for his complete ostracization; and this, historically, has been the chief prerogative of people who voted “on the Left,” which state of discursive affairs has periodically led a few “moderates” to resent the bullying gratuitousness of the practice and thereby deplore, in retort, the existence of a specular, intransigent “Fascism of the (Liberal) Left.”

The issue, though, is not one of apportioning equitably the intense pleasure of calling adversaries “fascists,” but to shift perspective and look upon human societies *entomologically*, viz., as special heaps of social insects subdivided into three castes: (i) a parasitical apparatus (in lieu of the royal procreative couple) drawing from (ii) a mass of slave-termites basic sustenance, which (iii) an intermediary layer of “skilled” worker-bees further refines. It is in the midst of the latter caste — the middle-class — that hangs the fate of the community; the middle-caste is the industrious, inventive conveyor belt that ties the slaves to the parasites: should its fealty and indenture to the upper stratum falter for any reason, the apparatus’s operation is in question. Hence the paramount exigency, from the parasites’ vantage point, of (i) making the lower castes thoroughly dependent upon them (mandatory connection to the banking Grid), and (ii) of conditioning their “belief system,” especially that of the middle one. And this explains the profusion through the ages of so-called theological, political, “morally hortative,” economic, and philosophical tracts. I say “especially” the mindset of middle-class because that of the slaves, spiritually debilitated as they already are by the day’s toil, congenially conforms by mimetic appetite to the barbarous deportment of the parasitical overlords (Veblen).

It is this entire societal configuration, erected for the proprietary exploitation of a parasitical elite, along with its spiritual equipage, that I subsume under the rubric of “fascism.” In this sense, Italo-German Fascism was no “capitalist” aberration, but a peculiar variant of a general template:

its pageantry, mythos, “New Man,” and the Chief’s cult of personality were adventitious traits, peculiar to that epoch, rather than the definitional apantage of what ought to be considered fascism broadly defined. To which definitional moment I now come by affixing my thesis in three consecutive turns.

I. Fascism as a paternalist (and authoritarian) composition of State, Labor, and Business Enterprise, in which “organised churches” intervene to mitigate the amplitude of the (parasitical) exploitation supporting it all.

II. More generally characterised, fascism is a supremacist alliance of militarism, centralised credit, and Big Business, typically acclaimed by a hallucinated swarm of termite-workers fanatically convinced of their intrinsic personal goodness (i.e., “God’s legions,” “*le peuple*” or “The Free”). In its latest geopolitical, “globalising” variant, it assumes the contours of what may be referred to as the “Structure” of “Techno-Fascism” or “Techno-Structure,” in which: (i) a dynastic male-driven elite is exclusively made up of WASPs hiding behind the populist screen of “The Respect for Diversity”; (ii) the vassal nations and ethnicities (of the rest of the world) are indiscriminately sunk into an Anglophone melting cauldron; (iii) ideally, families would be smashed into their basic, sexually polymorphic, and mutually incommunicative units; and (iv) the labour force is streamlined by inducting (into the lower echelons of the Structure) only the gifted, forcing all the others into mortally insipid “services,” and devising birth control and/or euthanising plans to phase out the redundant, useless rest of humanity (“dead-weight”).

III. The majority of organised (human) communities around the globe are all fascisms of one hue or another: parasitical technocracies piloted by variously anointed elites and founded on the Law of Violence (Tolstoy), in which nominally “private” and “public” economic concerns are fused into one coherent Structure psychically glued together by the crowds’ sublimating “awareness” of being the community’s hyper-moral gatekeepers. In fact, this sublimating “awareness,” which is in the nature of hallucinatory (auto-)hypnosis, is what is generically referred to as “democracy” in conventional discourse. And, from the viewpoint of modern-day citizens, this cohesive sentiment of being ethical paragons, when in reality all of

them are potentially monsters of the worst sort, ranges, culturally speaking, from the nauseating self-complacency of “*Italiani brava gente*” (Italians, good folk) to the Americans’ congregational libido for lynching and witch-burning (T. Szasz). On average, all people are fascist. So-called Right-wingers are fascist on account of their definitional attraction to predation, military prowess, and innate awe for State-corporate hierarchy, which inflates their professional swagger and illusory sense of self; Left-wingers even more so, for without the shielding ramparts of the “Opposition Party,” which is an integral buttress of the State, the “bleeding-hearts” and the “*anime belle*” (the beautiful souls) could not climb onto higher moral ground whence they may savagely fustigate and liquidate all political rivals (typically, what is left of the Conservative machos) along the path to higher office. As for the Catholics, either progressive or conservative, they, too, are fascist, for, ultimately, what they worship is not Christ but the structural, corporate might of the Church or, rather, nostalgically, what it once was.

Having thus laid out the definitional ground-plan for our analysis, let us see how Pessoa’s peculiar socio-economic ruminations fall, if they do, within our mould of fascist catechesis. For “a decadent poet” like me, he had noted, “politics is just the most dangerous of useless amusements” (Pessoa, 1996, p. 141). Pessoa’s thoughts and aphorisms are collected under three headings: selfishness, patriotism, and social dynamics.

Selfishness

Having abdicated from love, “the King of Gaps,” as Pessoa also liked to call himself, had no choice but to write a novel of his *solitude*. For as much as he marked his distance from the mediocre scruples of the equally lonesome *kleiner Mann*, Pessoa could not help losing himself in the utilitarian lucubrations of the typical middle-class nobody so completely that he and the “little man” ended up, again, being one and the same.

Occasionally, what he says of selfishness is reminiscent of treatments found in “heterodox” microeconomics textbooks of the didascalical sort: “Society,” he writes, “is a system of malleable egoisms, of intermittent competitions” (Pessoa, 2000, p. 159). But no matter how pliable the egoisms, affectionate contact has to be studiously uprooted

from the daily realm of human interactions: “close association,” Pessoa admonishes, must be “frozen to its superficialities so that all fraternal and social gestures will slip by and not [...] leave their imprint” (Pessoa, 1988a). Because a person’s stare or word may affect one “like an insult or like some filth,” men should be kept at a distance, which is easily done by not approaching them (Pessoa, 1998, pp. 96, 221). Properly disciplined individuals should therefore be “instinctively selfish like the flowers,” “unwittingly engaged in flowering [...] and no more” (Pessoa, 1972, p. 131).⁷ The Golden Rule is silly. “To suppose that people are like us and must feel as we do,” echoes Pessoa is “the principal error of literary imagination” (Pessoa, 1998, p. 400).

If so, why bother helping others? Why bother doing good? For the “ironbound egoist,” to help “is to commit the evil of interfering in the lives of others.” Acts of kindness are the whim’s impromptus: when sick, therefore, we should refuse a friend’s visit as categorically as he should object, in turn, to our violation of the privacy of his illness. “I have a simple morality,” says Pessoa: “not to do good or evil to anyone.” No to do evil, for “all of us in this world are living on board a ship that is sailing from one unknown port to another, and we should treat each other with a traveller’s cordiality. Not to do good because I don’t know what good is [...]. How do I know what evils I generate if I give the beggar money?” (Ibidem, pp. 33, 285, 286). In fact, an individual who abides by the most irreprehensible code of morality is inevitably bound to be swindled at every turn throughout his life. Bitterness and disillusion are the fruits to be reaped from such an obdurate and misguided pursuit of righteousness (Pessoa, 2000, p. 160). Possibly, then, this is the Gnostic’s occasional side-path to goodness; be cordial, not for goodness’s sake, but because there is nothing to be gained by it: “neither money, nor love, nor respect and perhaps peace of mind” (Pessoa, 1998, p. 236). Yet to think, in any event, that we must struggle for the achievement of everyone’s happiness and that a solution may be found to the “ills of society” is an idea — the *utopian’s* very own,

⁷ Alberto Caeiro, The Keeper of Flocks, XXIII aka Fernando Pessoa. Retrieved from <https://damadesign.tumblr.com/post/43158594891/the-keeper-of-flocks-by-alberto-caeiro-aka>. Other pseudonyms used by Fernando Pessoa were Álvaro de Campos, Ricardo Reis.

defining idea— whose conception “maddens” Pessoa (Pessoa, 1988a, p. 3). Those pretensions of this kind can arouse in him such enraging frustration is not due, he says, to some inner cruelty of his, but rather to the logical realisation that such ills are here stay and that to them there is no cure.

In me, the pain of others became more than a simple pain: there was the pain of seeing it, the pain of seeing it’s incurable, and the pain of knowing that my awareness of its incurableness precludes even the useless noble-mindedness of wishing I felt like doing something to cure it (Pessoa, 2001, p. 305).

So, frustration slowly turns into cynicism — while some political colour is bled into the argument’s texture. As when one of Pessoa’s magical personas, Alberto Caiero, comes to tell the story of a preacher who once lamented “how unjust it is that some should have money while others go hungry.” Thereupon, Caiero wonders, provocatively, whether the priest meant “hungry for food or only hungry for someone else’s dessert?” Doesn’t the pastor know that “there is injustice, the same as there is air”? So, there it is again, that stubborn utopian virus that renders men incapable of accepting injustice as they accept that “cork-trees weren’t born to be pines and oaks” (Pessoa, 1972, p. 137).⁸ And the more anarchists and utopians insist with their “mysticisms” on wanting to convince the others that the truth may be discovered and the world reformed, the more Pessoa is gripped by an outrage that waxes into full-blown “physical nausea” (Pessoa, 1998, p. 286). With these utopian anarchists, there can be no truce.

Thorstein Veblen to the lions!

Had not that anarchist thinker mused that in our era of absentee ownership and assembly lines, “the red cleavage runs not between those who own something and those who own nothing [...], but between those who own more than they personally can use and those who have an urgent need for more than they own”? (Veblen, 1923, p. 9) “Someone else’s dessert” symbolises precisely that surplus of “available energy” which the conservative upper classes withdraw from the lower classes, thereby preventing the latter from making “the effort required for the learning and adoption of new habits of thought” (Veblen, 1899, p. 204). Des-

sert is “spiritual development,” in short: the very pearl which British magus Aleister Crowley — and his disciple Pessoa, as shall be seen — would never think of wasting on others who could never hope to become anything beyond their given swinish form. “It is a matter of common notoriety,” Veblen noted, “that when individuals [...] are segregated from a higher industrial culture and exposed to a lower cultural environment [...], they quickly show evidence of reversion toward the spiritual features which characterise the predatory type.” “The outcome of the whole is a strengthening of the general conservative attitude of the community,” in particular if its “life as a collectivity is predominantly a life of hostile competitions with other groups.” In the final analysis, the maldistribution of income that warrants the incumbency of a retrograde aristocracy by depriving the people of “dessert” leads to the “assimilation of the lower classes to the type of human nature [bellicose, parasitical, and superstitious] that belongs primarily to the upper class only.” Thus, is sealed, for Veblen, the spiritual kinship between low-cultured commoners (“the people”) and the aristocrats of the “leisure class” (Ibidem, pp. 197, 204, 205, 226, 238, 244). In these terms, Veblen’s *Theory of the Leisure Class* constitutes a theoretical antithesis to Pessoa’s sociological model: being at each other’s antipodes, the two visions epitomise respectively the communitarian anarchistic and the national-conservative response to the challenge of rethinking social order in a world of pervasive mechanistic and technocratic uniformity (I will tackle Pessoa’s model shortly in connection with the call to patriotism).

In sum, Pessoa’s philosophising on the virtues of selfishness is at heart an economic exercise directed against the utopian “mysticisms” of anarchist thinkers. The urge to polemise against these “prostitutes of the great Libertarian doctrine,” as he called them, found its most accomplished and famous expression in the novella *The Anarchist Banker*. Its moral may strike as something of a facetious paradox — but it is not so. The tale, in fact, consists of a linear argument in support of opportunistic behaviour. Its narrator is a former anarchist turned banker who explains how he came to see his conversion as the true, practical realisation of anarchism’s principles. Pessoa first states the problem by defining what an anarchist is, namely “a rebel against the injustice of being

⁸ Alberto Caiero, *Sporadic Poems*.

born *socially* unequal.” As ever, the challenge for this class of rebels has been to devise precepts coherent with their reformist urge. Pessoa makes the first fundamental assumption: if “the law of nature” is the only law we should acknowledge, and if we, therefore, recognise that entities such as the State, matrimony and money are wholly unnatural, it follows that to sacrifice oneself “for humanity” is absurd. Altruism is itself another social myth; nothing worth fighting for. Adverting once more to the centrality of egoism, Pessoa, through the novel’s narrator, thus establishes that man “isn’t born a sharer.” “This idea of duty, of human solidarity,” he insists, “may be only considered natural *if it carries with it some egotistical reward*.” With Sadean accents, Pessoa reiterates that “to give aid to someone is to judge that person a cripple.”⁹ And by wanting to save everybody through this “tyranny of aid,” these “syndicalist fellows with the bombs” end up “restricting everybody’s freedom.” The high-minded purpose of the project would be thus entirely defeated.

The second assumption: Consider “a society where only men’s natural qualities operate”; if a group of people drawn therefrom is assembled haphazardly, Pessoa reasons that order can only emerge through a despotic manipulation of the majority by a leading minority. In other words, a collectivity — whatever the orientation of its individual constituents — is by nature incapable of organising itself in a form other than tyranny. “Tyranny for tyranny,” the narrator concludes, “let’s live with the one we’ve got, for at least we are used to it and therefore resent it less than we would a new tyranny [...] that [comes] directly from Nature.”

Prescription. “What is to be done?” For the anarchist banker, the answer is “very simple: it’s all for us to work for the same end, but separately.”

How? Consider money: how is one to divest himself of its “influence and tyranny without avoiding the need to meet it head-on?” There is only one way, he says: “*to acquire it*” (Pessoa, 1988b, pp. 9–54).

So ends the story of the anarchist purist who found the Grail of revolutionary praxis by going into banking. That Pessoa’s demonstration may be confuted on the basis of its questionable assump-

tions is not what ought to drive the discussion here. Let us say, instead, that as a composition, *The Anarchist Banker* is beguilingly clever, which makes its conservative, *patriotic* intimation all the more blatant. This theorem is designed to prove that revolutionary (i.e., radically progressive) aspirations are not congenital and wholesome impulses in any social body; if anything, they are extraneous mispersuasions proper of “traitors” (Pessoa, 1994, p. 144), because for Pessoa there can be no political positioning outside the patriotic confines of the polity (the discussion of the next section will show this clearly). Notice, moreover, that in order to achieve personal, egoistic freedom, the anarchic Pessoa, of all “social perversions,” chooses to embrace money; not marriage or the State: money. In other words, he comes to side with the ruling pecuniary oligarchy. Banking *is* power (Gerschenkron, 1962) and admittedly an exploitative cartel — the very thing anarchists abhor and live to destroy. So, Pessoa’s pragmatic conclusion operates a reversal of the theoretical premises; he spins a provocative oxymoron (an “anarchist banker”) on idealistic premises (the search for freedom), with a subtle twist, however (in devising a practical way out).

The argumentation is not properly Machiavelian: there is no shameless invocation of violence. The Pessoaan solution, rather, is one more testimony of the Neo-Gnostic retainer, who sees no alternative to “the law of nature”—i.e., violence and tyranny—, but, who, on the other hand, is so loath of dirtying his hands that he chooses to inhabit Kafka’s “Castle” as a mid-level employee cocooned by the erudition of his silence. In other words, he goes into opportunistic, conniving “hiding”; he “embosks” himself. Italians are thoroughly familiar with *imboscamento* as the art of survival, as was also Pessoa’s fellow post-modern Right-winger Ernst Jünger, who wrote outstanding pages on the peculiar typology of this “embosked dissident,” referring to him alternatively as the “brushwood fighter” (*der Waldgänger*) (Jünger, 1951) or the “anarch”—to contradistinguish him, like Pessoa, from the insufferably naive anarchist. The caveat of classics by Jünger such as *The Glass Bees* (Jünger, 1957), or the fantastic *Eumeswil* (Jünger, 1977)—which features the unforgettable anarch, Manuel Venator, the cupbearer and informal councillor of a tyrant named “The Condor”—is the exact same as that of *The Anarchist Banker*, namely that there

⁹ For a reflection on the theme of gifting and its associated dilemmas in postmodern thought see Preparata (2008).

can be no opposition to the pressure of power, and that to survive, the initiate has no choice but to compromise by recouping for himself, with flair, an exclusive patch of spiritual privacy out of the quilted intricacies of modern-day despotic apparatuses. This is the poetics of corruptness.

Politically, what thus emerges from Pessoa's quasi-sardonic moral tale is his exquisitely modern assumption of a (conservatively) *Libertarian* stance, in fact. As related above, he did style himself an "English-style Conservative, that is, a Liberal within conservatism, and absolutely anti-reactionary," which is akin to saying that he would nowadays side with (the European sympathisers of) so-called "Libertarians," that diminutive yet influential fringe of the American Right that preconises a fanatical and totalising faith in the unfettered deregulation of "the market," in fact, of any market — in ferocious antagonism, that is, to any form of liberticide "State-meddling."

Doctrinally, Libertarians fervently apperceive "free markets" as a preternatural space of gainful opportunity wherein divine justice *could* providentially work itself out, if only the "self-regulating-magic" were not systematically obstructed by "Socialists," i.e., humanity's legion of unfit mediocrities, who perversely wreak "regulatory" violence on the economic system with a view to appropriate resources they otherwise would not have been able and deserving to earn, entrepreneurially. In this myth, (i) the "market" (hypostasis) is God's Kingdom on earth; (ii) Jesus Christ is the "Walrasian auctioneer," who sees to it that "prices clear the market," aligning everybody's preferences on the bidding platform; (iii) "the poor" are either the institutional victims of Socialist Caesars, who denied them the "American dream," and/or simply the several billion squits who failed to pass the existential test of free-marketeering fitness; and, to return to the *Anarchist Banker*, (iv) money can only be gold: in the dizzying glimmer of the solid metal, they proudly worship a salvific counterpoise to the malevolently inflationary fiat paper of the State.

Libertarians are a peculiar lot: they like to think of themselves as a self-standing elitist movement contradistinguished by a finer understanding of economics' deeper matrix. Through this prism, they claim to be able to account for every facet of history and social life. Yet, far from being a self-subsisting, intellectually independent ag-

gregation, the chief function of this sect is rather to assist organically the creedal apparatus of Techno-Fascism; this they do by communing in collegiums of true-believing vestals, whose paramount, the perennial task is to uphold, reinvigorate, and profess the purity of the (Free Markets) creed for the sacramental edification of all Liberal fascists. Theirs is a liturgical and custodial vocation: what they practically propitiate is to deflect man's monarchist instinct (Jünger) away from the old dynasty of the sword to the modern princes of the market: that long line of corporate barons, stemming from the likes of J.P. Morgan down to their contemporary epigones, e.g., Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, etc.

Libertarians are neo-royalist chamberlains in disguise. Organizationally, they consist of bigoted troops comprising a mass of rank-and-file idiots fronted by a disarticulated general staff of guru-partisans, few of whom — unlike Pessoa had he been recruited by them today — seem to be wise to the game.

These maniacs are also (propagandistically) fielded whenever the System needs to "plead" with public opinion for introducing legislation designed to shield, say, giant banking of telecommunications trusts from fiscal encroachment, liquidation and/or supervision; or when it is time to institutionalise a mild narcotisation of the masses, ever invoking the "freedom to choose" (viz., with the 40-year runup to the recent marijuanization of society).

The alcoholic Pessoa would have subscribed to all this in full: he saw prohibition as nugatory and "anti-social"; the production and export of luxuries as untouchable; and "spontaneous monopoly" as the "natural" and perfectly "legal" outcome of "organic" market forces (Pessoa, 2000, pp. 50, 54, 55, and 145). Foreshadowing the "theoretical" fad of "contestable markets," which would be confected by free-marketeering economists in the 1980s to protect certain giant (and powerful) conglomerates from antitrust dismemberment (Baumol et al., 1990), he thought "false" any manoeuvre undertaken by governmental agencies to curtail the dominant position of *efficient* "trusts." Q.E.D.

Patriotism

The spiritual premise to Pessoa's political proposition is the post-modern conviction that civilisation had presently "broken down." His was

the cohort that had come to this world to find it disfigured by the “destructive work” of past generations — of fathers that had been rushed in their iconoclastic desire to reform, unheeding, as they went, that gone in the wreckage would also be the “supports for those who had both a mind and a heart.” Thus was Pessoa orphaned of those assurances that bespeak of a solid “religious order”; without religious order, there could never be moral order, and without moral order, there could never be political order. We are divine creatures; “all is essentially religion” (Pessoa, 1996, p. 53).

Drunk on alien formulas, on the mere process of reason and science, the generations that preceded us undermined all the foundations of the Christian faith [...]. Out of [the] extreme collision of doctrines, all that remained was that the only certainty there was that there were none [...]. And so it was that we awoke to a world avid for social novelties, a world that joyfully set out on the conquest of a liberty that it did not know, of a progress never defined. But the abortive criticism of our fathers, if it bequeathed to us the impossibility of being Christians, did not leave us any happiness at not being Christian; if it bequeathed to us a disbelief in established moral formulas, it did not leave us an indifference to morality and the rules of living humanly; if it left the political question uncertain, it did not leave our spirit indifferent to the resolution of the problem. Our fathers happily destroyed because they lived in an epoch that still had reflections of the solidity of the past (Pessoa, 1998, pp. 140–41).

“Because what [he valued as] natural and instinctive had failed,” Pessoa thought we all found ourselves “faced with a dilemma”: we could either passively mourn “the death of civilisation,” or subject our sensibility to an “artificial adjustment” to this modern, alien “milieu” (Pessoa, 1988a (“Ultimatum”), p. 73). Alternatively, the dilemma reflected the only two types of “constant moods” with which Pessoa thought life worth living: “with the noble joy of religion, or with the noble sorrow of having lost one” (Pessoa, 2001, p. 208). Ever dwelling in the interstice, the Gnostic Knight of Portugal broke the apathy and laid a wager: he would venture a solution of his own to the political question — possibly succeeding thereby to trade off some sorrow for a sliver of joy. It was going to be the sociology of chiaroscuro.

Suppose the mystery of divine origin surrounding our existence as humans and collectivities is unknowable. In that case, it perforce follows that a discipline devoted to studying the laws of motion of these human aggregates is itself a branch of our religious ignorance. We, therefore, ought to acknowledge that social science is a “mystique”: we clearly *feel* something whose nature, however, we cannot fathom (Pessoa, 1997, p. 201). What little can we, then, say of peoples, of nations? What are they, essentially? “Mysteries” (Pessoa, 1992 [1934], p. 22), says Pessoa in *Mensagem* (“Message”), speaking the language of spiritualists, who also dream of “cultures” in the shape of “archangels”—i.e., folk-spirits, the higher emanations of the sacred myths, deputised at the dawn of humanity to inform the collective makeup of the founding races. The key to the secrets of each nation lies hidden in a riddle: what makes a nation a nation? What action, Pessoa wonders, manifests most purely “that which is hereditary in [a people’s] social instinct?” It is the “action of *speaking*”. Speech is a world unto its own, self-contained, and naturally indicative of a prime reality, not conducive to anything other than its aboriginal force: manifest and poetic (Pessoa, 1994, p. 128). Exhilarated, Pessoa had found the key.

I have no political or social feeling. But in a certain sense I do have a highly patriotic feeling. My country is the Portuguese language (Pessoa, 1998, p. 9).

Speech is the breath of the Motherland (*patria*). But language *is* patriotism, and its custodian is the *people*. Now, since there can be no language without thought, the collective mind that speaks the tongue is what Pessoa enshrines as “*public opinion*,” *vox populi*. And “If public opinion is thus based on the patriotic instinct, and if this last is, in the final analysis, the instinct of national traditions,” Pessoa deduces that “the foundation of public opinion is the national tradition, that there can be no public opinion other than tradition” (Pessoa, 1994, pp. 128–29). Our existence as a group (and as units within the group) has meaning so long as it draws spiritual nutriment from its primordial, unfathomable roots.

Public opinion is a condition of a *tendency*; it is an *atmosphere*, a *pressure*, in no case is it an orientation or an attitude (Ibidem, p. 130).

But there is more. Like all instincts, Pessoa warns that public opinion is “radically *antagonis-*

tic.” Veblen would say “clannish” or “barbarous,” in a deprecatory tone that issues from the (anarchistic) persuasion that such a deficient state need not persist if apt educational programs are set in train to correct it; but for the Crowleyite Pessoa, “the populace is not educable because it is populace. If it were possible to transform it into individuals, it would be educable, it would be educated, but then it would no longer be populace” (Pessoa, 1996, p. 187).

A wholesome people is spontaneously prone to exhibiting an aristocratic or monarchic leaning; never ever has a people been inherently liberal or democratic; never ever has a people bothered to defend, as its own, anything but its very own selfish interests, and its own Fatherland collectively [...]. The populace is fundamentally, radically, irremediably reactionary (Pessoa, 1994, p. 139; Pessoa, 1996, p. 187).

Anti-modern conservatives are diehard elitists and populists of the callous sort; Jünger, of course, held the same belief: “Man,” he wrote, “is a monarchist by instinct”; he is innately drawn to the chieftain’s charisma. Congenitally hostile to “science and natural law,” the populace craves “the miracle” instead: it is the only thing it “comprehends,” says Pessoa. “The true distinction,” he adds, “is between people and individuals”; between “supermen” and “common men.”¹⁰ By insisting on distinguishing between “people and the aristocracy, or the governors and those who are governed,” anarchists make a “painful, crass error.” In the eyes of Neo-Gnostic conservatives, idealists are unforgivably oblivious to the sacred dichotomy that sifts the Bataillean splendour of *sovereignty* from the chaff of “humanity”:

On one side, the kings and their prestige, the emperors with their glory, the geniuses with their aura, the saints with their haloes, the leaders of the people with their domination, the prostitutes, and the wealthy [...], on the other, [...] the delivery boy on the corner, [...] the gossiping barber, the shop assistant [...] (Pessoa, 1998, p. 261).

Individuals lead, the populace follows: “pleasure is for dogs, material well-being is for slaves, man has honour and power.” Social justice, for

instance, might be legitimate, but it remains a concern of a lesser sort if weighed against the exigencies of the aristocracy (Pessoa, 1996, p. 331). In light of these considerations, the nature of Pessoa’s professed anti-communism acquires relief. Clearly, he could never side with the politicised proletariat of his age, with demonstrating workers whom he used to gaze upon “with ironic sadness.” “What a bad group,” he thought whenever these “sub-people” (Pessoa, 1994, p. 149) happened to file by as if floating “like garbage in a river” (Pessoa, 1998, pp. 162–63). To think that we could relate to one another in terms of perfect equality and democratic suffrage is, for Pessoa, an ideological effect of the Christian intoxication. By affirming that Man is possessed of an immortal soul that is divine and redeemable by the Son of God, Christian dogma has elevated Man above all mundane hierarchies. And by doing so, it has fallen prey to the practical heresy of considering the moral individual *superior* to the political individual (Pessoa, 1996, p. 77); it has made itself blind to the irreducible chasm separating sovereign individuals from a beastly, uneducable, yet folkishly-grounded populace. And, in the same vein, Pessoa deplored the European ashrams of Mme Blavatsky’s fashionable “Hindu theosophy,” which propounded, no less irresponsibly than the Churches themselves, that “impious and repugnant doctrine of the equality of the sexes and the races.” All such parties were guilty in his opinion of insinuating conceptions that are deeply “antagonistic” and detrimental to the natural order of “social existence” (Ibidem, pp. 82, 101).

Why? Because the “most perfect system” we should be aiming at is “the aristocratic republic,” that is, a simple structure made of a “pagan” aristocracy and its people, the two being fused by “an identical substance” (Pessoa, 1994, 25): the national substratum. In this sense, the moral individual is never to rise above the reasons of the State, which should swell him instead with a sentiment of overwhelming fealty. A republic should be preferable to a monarchy, which Pessoa thought “too dependent on one man.” However, in light of the conclusions drawn from his economics, the regime he actually seemed to be envisaging is a modern oligarchy managed –under cover of complete “secrecy”– (Pessoa, 1997, p. 132) by the stewards of old families and diplomatic-military

¹⁰ Pessoa (1996, p. 187). “Between me and the peasant there is a qualitative difference that derives from the abstract thought and disinterested emotion that exist in me; between the peasant and the cat there is nothing more than a difference of degree in terms of spirit” (Pessoa, 1998, p. 263).

(Pessoa, 1994, p. 176) combines, flanked by their financial appendages.

Economically, it is understood that the people must slave for their masters: it has always been so, and nothing will alter the age-old perception that slavery is “logical and legitimate” (Pessoa, 1994, pp. 141, 147; Pessoa, 2000, pp. 133–34; Pessoa, 1996, pp. 320–21). So that we could forever forget the “fundamental stupidity” with which present-day millionaires govern while amassing capital, neo-Pagan leaders would have, instead, to walk the ancient walk by consummating “gigantic continental sins,” such as “prodigious extravagances of building and excavating, [and] romantic wars of oppression and liberation” (Pessoa, 2001, p. 198). In any case, a republic thus conceived would be self-policing: Pessoa trusts that any potential abuse on the part of the oligarchs would be kept in check by the “quasi-corporeal presence” of public opinion, whose body language would at all times communicate to the aristocrats the degree of agreement to their pontifical management of the commonweal (Pessoa, 1994, p. 177).

Abroad, the aristocratic republic should naturally give in to “the human urge to dominate,” preferably not by shedding blood, but by erecting amongst uncultivated and perfectly useless “Zulus” (Pessoa, 1996, p. 321) a long-lasting, cultural empire, “an imperialism of grammarians, of poets” (Ibidem, pp. 328–29). But on this count, Pessoa zigzags a bit: if on the one hand, he recognises that no empire is “worth breaking a child’s doll for,” and that “violence” is “always a wide-eyed form of stupidity” (Pessoa, 1998, pp. 253, 265), he nonetheless deprecates the “infecundity of peace” and the “disadvantages of concord.” It is from *hate*, he says, that all psychic life springs forth. “From the hatred that pits man against man, civilisation is born”; likewise, progress is the child of competition and cultural impetus that of national rivalry: “this is the hard law” (Pessoa, 1994, p. 140). In sum, violence should certainly be countenanced, except for revolutionary violence, which is treason, and the “brutality” of a strictly marauding type of colonialism, which Pessoa censures as “extra-cultural nationalism.”

For this and all other purposes, the masses would have to be regimented by calling them to the colours of the national totem. To Pessoa, the “pagan religion” effects this labour of “political organisation” most effectively precisely because

it resolves itself fully in “the life of a city or state, without aspiring to be universal” (Pessoa, 2001, p. 149). If the fathers had indeed destroyed the religious humus of the nation, one would have to recreate it with some kind of Ersatz. And it was with this intention that Pessoa had imagined a plan for the promotion of a “mystical nationalism.” A divided people can be united anew by infusing it with a “missionary concept” of itself (Pessoa, 1994, p. 175). Public opinion feeds off miracles and myths — and none is more appealing for a community whose bellicose animus the chiefs wish to arouse than the messianic call. What Hegel wished for Prussia, Pessoa wished for his own Fatherland: Portugal, he so thought, was destined to carry out “its great occult destiny” (Pessoa, 1997, p. 92). Theretofore, the world had had four empires: the Greek, the Roman, the Christian and the British; Portugal, then, would be the apex of the fifth. But no empire could aspire to sovereign glory without the banner of a Christic Redeemer; so, enter King Sebastian (Sebastião), *O Encoberto*, “the Hidden One”—Pessoa’s Mahdi of choice,¹¹ extrapolated from Portuguese history, which narrates of this young monarch that led his troops in a suicidal expedition against the Turks on North-African shores in 1578. The Portuguese contingent was routed, but the King’s body was never found — hence the legend of his return as the herald of a new age. The Hidden One would be the highest emissary of the Fifth Empire: “how can we hope for his return,” pleads Pessoa, “if we do not create beforehand the forces that in turn will give him life?”¹²

Quando virás, ó Encoberto, Sonho das eras potoguez...(Pessoa, 1992 [1934], p. 92).¹³

The myth of the Fifth Empire and its twining to that of Don Sebastian, which was the fantasy of a Jesuit preacher of the XVIIth century, were recurrent tropes of Portuguese folklore, not Pessoa’s inventions. Pessoa’s originality lay in the “Neocon” re-proposition of these mythologems as tools of nationalist agitprop.¹⁴ Our Portuguese

¹¹ A choice that is also a manifest homage to Crowley’s “Hidden God” (Pasi, 2001).

¹² Ibidem, p. 159. King Sebastian disappeared in the battle of Al-Ksar el Kebir, in North Africa — modern-day Morocco.

¹³ “When will you come, Oh Hidden One, Vision of Portuguese eras...”

¹⁴ “[The rout of 1578] virtually wiped out the aristocratic youth of the reign and the death of Don Sebastian led to a dynastic vacuum that allowed Spain, then under Philip II, to establish its hegemony over Portugal.” (Pasi, 2001, p. 140).

knight also mentioned a sixth empire: “the reign of the Anti-Christ,” whose advent would mark “the dissolution of our civilisation,” the final expunction of all things Christian — an epoch far beyond foreseeable things, on which the poet wished to remain silent.¹⁵

So, in the end, these were the fabrications that neo-pagan potentates needed to tell the people in order to rule over them. If, indeed, “the world is run by lies,” then whoever wishes to “arouse the world must lie to it deliriously, and the more he is able to lie to himself and convince himself of the truth of his lie, the more successful he will be.” As for “the public,” it will roll with it: ever the spiritual and credulous accomplice of its corrupt and mendacious aristocratic vanguard, “humanity,” says Pessoa, “hates the truth, for it knows that the truth...isn’t attainable” (Pessoa, 2001, p. 163). *Vulgus vult decipi, ergo decipiat.* And so, it goes.

But the reasons and motivations behind the necessity to deceive public opinion are not as unscrupulously raw and uninspired as these citations suggest. If it is true that Pessoa’s mystical nationalism was nothing but an imaginative script, there is little doubt, however, that the author’s conviction of its efficacy was not predicated on mere self-delusion. King Sebastian, as shining light of the Fifth Empire, was obviously a copy of the Conquering Christ of the Roman Church. Pessoa conjured it in order to attempt that “artificial adjustment,” which he thought necessary to salvage the salvageable in the face of modernity’s complete spiritual insolvency. Yet, for him, the palingenetic veracity of King Jesus was no more biting than that of King Sebastian. Myth the one and myth the other, both of them “lies,” both of them impossible “truths”—though possibly of very different, if not opposed, moral valence. In essence, the approach to this game of political mythopoeia is one of syncretism and Masonic wisdom: there exists a Secret Doctrine common to all initiates which every nation has fashioned into religion, couching it in its own vernacular and variously drawing to this end the narrative ingredients from indigenous and/or neighbouring lore. Within religious traditions, (fiercely antagonistic) currents abound, of course, and the true polarities thereof may be of extremely difficult

detection because of the tangle of esoteric themes, borrowed and re-elaborated symbolisms, and apocryphal decoys, which altogether enshrouds the realm of dogmatic faith.

The Pessoaan material reviewed up to this point corroborates the overall impression that we are dealing with an intriguing blend of ancient and tested rhapsodic aromas in the tonality of conservative hopelessness: this late Lusitanian elegiac project is an original mix of Epicurean anti-modernism, Nietzschean existentialism, Elizabethan mannerism, detective-style deductive scherzos, surrealism *avant la lettre*, Neo-Gnostic mythography, Crowley’s pagan magic, and Machiavellian, clandestine statecraft. In this last regard, Pessoa’s fascistic proclivity is also anticipatory of Leo Strauss’s Neo-conservative suggestion that, in the cosmic absence of Truth, tyrants should shepherd the unassuming masses by means of a pseudo-religious cult of ancestral gloriousness. Similar prescriptions, of course, litter the texts of Jünger and Bataille, all of whose ideologically compact and germane beliefs, along with Pessoa’s, I have endeavoured to cluster under the comprehensive heading of post-modern (or anti-modern), Neo-Gnostic thought.

To conclude this section, I should like to insist once again on the almost perfectly antipodal opposition existing between Pessoa’s political testimony and Thorstein Veblen’s. Older by a full generation, Veblen (1857–1929), the modernist critic, remained wedded to the faith in progress and in those very machines, which the post-modern Pessoa thought “monstrous,” though nevertheless necessary to relaunch in the early 1900s the nationalist fortunes of Portugal (on its way to becoming, he so wished, the Fifth Empire) (Pessoa, 1994, p. 119). When Pessoa affirms that the national idea resolves itself essentially in the symbiosis of the (benighted) people and its aristocracy — the two having the “same substance”—he enthrones that conservative, and exploitative, the alliance of barbarous interests, which Veblen incessantly denounced as an insufferable holdover from our savage past in the otherwise progressive era of technology.

Pessoa’s politics as a whole; his decadent love for the “marvellously futile” (Pessoa, 1998, p. 228); the incitement to leaders to “lie deliriously” and commit great sins of squandering grandeur; and the overall acrid derision of (Leftist) social ac-

¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 160–61, 167. “When will the Anti-Christ come? Until the day of his advent, there will not be peace in the souls of men, or discipline in their hearts” (Pessoa, 1996, p. 192).

tivism do not just retrace the line dividing uncompromisingly an “anarch” from an anarchist. On a deeper level, the story of this spiritual, and ever significant, the clash is a constant summons to the great challenge faced by the intelligentia — whose exponents, in fact, are drawn for the middle class, i.e., the class standing between the “knight” and the “populace.” When Pessoa affirmed, in a strange turn of phrase, that “only the bourgeoisie, which is the absence of social class, can create the future” (Pessoa, 1994, p. 149), he was in fact conceding that the match is still wide open: precisely because what had gone on before has been irremediably shattered, it need not follow that a Neo-conservative restoration of the dismal kind he was advocating is for us the only viable option. We can still hope for peace and true democracy — we can still dream of the anarchist option. Yet systems of thought such as those of post-modern masters — and especially that of Pessoa, with its insistence on the mystical origin of our sociological curiosities — should not be heeded by individuals with anarchist leanings merely as adversarial warnings but should be recognised instead as sobering intimations that the social problem is far more (religiously) complex than what a fanatically positivistic streak may lead them to presume. Hence, I would be inclined to surmise that Veblen’s analysis and conception of progress — as well as those of the progressive Left as a whole — would have enormously profited from a sharper appreciation of mythology and of the question of evil in strictly theodicean terms.

Social Dynamics

Pessoan sociology is a reaction to the doctrinal body of Liberalism — or “British constitutionalism,” as he otherwise labelled it. To him, as said, in order to understand social change, one must intuit the underlying spiritual, religious crosscurrents that pull the world’s peoples in given directions. Moreover, no less important is the assumption that national entities are conservative, belligerent aggregates consisting of aristocracy and populace. If these are the premises, British constitutionalism, which in the last century-and-half westerners have all taken for granted as a “scientific discovery” in the art of social engineering, should have been recognised instead for what it truly is. And that is the most up-to-date item in the art of fascist travesty: as

such, so-called “Liberal democracy” perpetuates the tenure of an aristocratic/oligarchic establishment by concealing its machinations behind the choreographed bluster of a grand, simulated enfranchisement.

There are no sincere liberals. Besides, there aren’t any liberals (Pessoa, 2006a, p. 72).

This system’s “praetorian guard” is split into “parties” that battle one another at election time by means of “money and secrecy.” Suffrage amongst pre-selected candidates merely measures the relative strength of the “organised political majority, which, compared to the actual majority of society, is a minority, and generally a small minority.” The reason why this social construct has enjoyed such success is not due to some formulaic “perfection” or “superstitious” advantage, but rather to the social health of Britain’s (today, Anglo-America’s) public opinion (Pessoa, 1994, pp. 178, 138, 180, 182, 132, 179). That is to say that the Anglo-American commonwealth has been able to foist its governmental model on alien constituencies thanks to unparalleled imperialist flair, which is itself enhanced by its people’s undisputed patriotic fitness. Truthfully, then, what has decided the quasi-universal diffusion of parliamentarianism is, for Pessoa, a rather contingent matter of temperamental style. In other terms, *the world now copes with this particular regimen simply because it is the constitutional export of the victorious invader*; because it happens to “adapt” to the “impotent,” i.e., drab, unheroic, and hypocritical soul of “peninsular” and “British individualism” (Pessoa, 1996, p. 223). In this regard, in what is early detection of a pattern now become universally familiar, Pessoa took special care to scoff at Britain’s professed championing of human “rights” and “justice” in light of the country’s genocidal record in China, Ireland and South Africa.¹⁶ “The British spirit,” one of Pessoa’s heteronyms once railed, “is the deification of the lie” (Pessoa, 2006b, p. 469).

¹⁶ Pessoa (1994, p. 139). Vis-à-vis Britain and the members of the Entente, Pessoa’s position is consistently and unabashedly hostile, except for one seriously inconsistent pronouncement: although, at the time of the Great War, he repeatedly recommended a spiritual alliance with the pagan spirit of the Central Powers versus the degenerate Protestantism of the Allies (Pessoa, 1996, pp. 99, 106–7, 109–10); he once declared himself thankful to Free-Masonry for laying the foundation of the Entente Cordiale, which, in fact, secured the Allies’ victory in WWI (Pessoa, 1997, p. 147).

The advent of British constitutionalism was organically accompanied by a theoretical appendage, which is, for the most part, what we have been calling for nearly two centuries “social science” or “political economy.” Pessoa rates the latter the joint construction of French Enlightenment and Europe’s “mystical imperialisms.” In his opinion, the most conspicuous impingement of modern sociology on the observer’s mindset is the complete “obnubilation of the political sense”: egged on by incessant cogitation and an impatient, though sacrosanct urge for realism, Pessoa found Liberalism’s abstract propositions so gratuitously “pointless” and “useless” as to suggest that, by turning these propositions into their exact contrary, one may be fairly certain to hit Truth on the head (Pessoa, 1994, p. 111).

Now, in attempting to articulate the opportunity for *reform* in the shrinking spaces of modern-day power systems — which, as just stated, is the decisive challenge for middle-class intellectuals—, Pessoa jettisons every single piece of Liberal dogma. He casts overboard all abstract suggestions that social phenomena may always be construed as the additive will of sovereign individuals (e.g., the “democratic assembly”), and proceeds to steer on a decidedly *conspiratorial* tack. A society, Pessoa says, may be reformed only by a “non-collective movement,” that is, an organised “*minority*” animated by an awakening sentiment of “national cohesion” and fronted by a charismatic leader, a so-called “genius” (Pessoa, 1996, pp. 214–15). It was, indeed, in these terms that he interpreted the Soviet revolution: in times of upheaval, a mobilised fringe of fanatics — the Bolsheviks — led by their genius, Lenin, and financed by “secret Jewish organisations,” had managed to turn Russia’s catastrophic post-war disorganisation to its extraordinary advantage (Ibidem, pp. 233, 241). The Soviet case is the principal instance cited by Pessoa to illustrate one of two basic scenarios that make up his social change model.

Essentially, social equilibrium is predicated on the harmonious composition of two main forces: a conservative (“integrating”) and a progressive (“disintegrating”) force. When the (conservative) elite manages to rally the populace to the banner of national solidarity and the intelligentsia as well by harnessing the urge for “progress” (quenched for the most part by more or less aggressive technological advance) to the self-serving programs of

the State, the system is at rest. Pessoa devised a brilliant synopsis of social dynamics by envisioning the consequences prompted by the disruptively disproportionate gravitation of the community toward the conservative pole. In this case, the imbalance triggers a chain reaction consisting of three main steps. 1) An immoderate dose of conservatism should be expected to stultify the nation and cause it to “stagnate.” 2) As the forces of progressivism strive to shake off the pall of lethargy, national cohesion breaks up. Thereupon dissent takes the form of xenomania, which, in its most extreme form, often degenerates into “idiotic mimetism.” 3) The conservative strata react, in turn, to the xenophiles’ modish excess by clinging ever more fiercely to their anachronistic mores. The system thus reaches a perturbed state characterised by a tedious, uneventful and low-intensity scuffle between what Pessoa designates as “organic traditionalism” (i.e., the entrenched conservatism of the Right) and “organic progressivism” (i.e., the xenophile confusedness of the Left).

In the other scenario, that in which the equilibrium is broken instead by a pronounced swerve toward progressivism (“super-progressivism”), the repercussions are as follows. When progressive ambition overly prevails so much so that the “other classes” find themselves unable to step into its stride (“if they could, the equilibrium would not be altered”), the aristocracy rises to counter the force of dissent so aggressively that the country sinks into a state of anarchy. Through civil strife, “super-progressivism” is likely to engender a dis-solutive process of de-nationalisation which only a patriotically binding counterforce can remedy: and that, for Pessoa, is *war*—“any sort of war, preferably a just war, in which to thrust the nation violently” (Pessoa, 1994, pp. 112–13, 191).

Despite its simplicity, the theory is powerful. By way of illustration, I can see how elegantly the two (disequilibrium) scenarios, in reverse sequence, may account for Italy’s recent experience. Super-progressivism fairly depicts the mood prevailing in that country in the mid-sixties when the pendulum had unambiguously swung in favour of progressive aspirations. Factions’ hostile to the Catholic axis sought in two successive waves to leverage these forces with a view to destabilising the Christian-Democrat tenure. The conservative bastion countered the attack at once by embroil-

ing itself and its enemies in sophisticated terrorist tactics that took a severe toll on the nation (1969-early 80s), and in so doing, all clans ended up foiling any attempt at social change. From the Right's viewpoint, the manoeuvre bought it a reprieve until its partial demise in the 90s (Preparata, 2012). Despite the violence of the 70s (some called it a "low-intensity" civil conflict), a full-scale, nation-wide civil confrontation was highly unlikely, and, therefore, a patriotic war would not have been a viable egress also considering that Italy's geopolitical status as an American colony would not have allowed it, and, more importantly, that the average Italian is, for historical reasons, congenitally unpatriotic.

What came after that (1980s-present) is modelled rather accurately by the scenario of the ultra-conservative disequilibrium, which was itself the legacy of more than a decade of the aforementioned Intelligence-directed terrorism, as well as of the imperial incumbency of the United States, which after the *refoulement* of the Catholics, rose to manage things as the exclusive (and somewhat uninterested) landlord of this forsaken "boot." National creativity in the arts and sciences, which had been luxuriant during the three decades following WWII, came to an abrupt halt. MTV, (artfully dubbed) Hollywood shows, and the *New York Times* bestsellers were swiftly summoned to fill the vacated spaces *en masse*. Silvio Berlusconi's private media empire was, in fact, built through the import of industrial quantities of (cheap) American action movies and TV series. (And Italians are extremely proud of having, as they claim, the best dubbers in the world: I cannot think of a sorrier and more despairing testimony of inferiority-plagued provincialism). Meanwhile, in the desperate effort to be at once a parody of the American Democratic Party and that of its old Communist self, the Italian Left gradually transmogrified before sinking into what appears. Indeed, an irreversible condition of complete xenophile idiocy: Italy's former (numerous and stridently anti-US) Communists, once enthusiastic recipients of Muscovite gold and fluent in the Marxist-Leninist mother-tongue, turned into rabid Americanists. The elite, on the other hand, has succeeded without excessive discomfort in patching up for itself a heteroclite existence, traversed as it inevitably is by the foreign accents that have already bamboozled the progressives,

and the hidebound traditionalism of its most provincial electors, who somehow still manage to find, say, Neapolitan folklore exalting and the "invention" of pizza a badge of pride.

Italians have now been living in this sub-optimal ultra-conservative (dis-) equilibrium for the past thirty years, juggling as inauthentically as possible this foreign Liberal regime with their pathological hedonism, food-mania, soccer-stupor, bogus suffrages, neo-feudal maldistribution of wealth, rapacious gerontocracy, and squalid intrigues — as if epochally compelled to win the gold in a frenzied race to lose face faster and more spectacularly than all other contending descendants of peoples that once were "great." Italy's lost glamour aside, Pessoa saw through this sort of sham early on. And, loosely, his theory does not only apply to the other disfigured nations of the Greater or Lesser Wars of the 1900s but also to the self-confident termitaries of the Global Age. For instance, one could also say that in the USA, a mild form of super-progressivism had managed to slip through the meshes of the second Clinton administration (1996–2000), as it were. Domestically, as the semi-belligerent mood propitiated under Bush Sr. (1988–1992) had greatly relented since the days of Gulf One (1991), it seemed as though the late nineties were witnessing the onset of an overall relaxed clime for broad social critique, which was thoroughly shattered, however — violently so and with suspicious timing — by George Bush Jr.'s "patriotically binding" War on Terror (2001-present).

Concluding Considerations

Yes, admittedly, Pessoa was but a pretext: not that his political economy, little-known and neglected though it may be, is irrelevant in the grander scheme of Pessoaan things; or that all of the above was said "for sport," wanting to annoy Pessoa's stuck-up groupies by labelling their hero a "fascist." The eagerness, after blowing his "cover," to add a name as heavy as Pessoa's to that cohort of Right-wing postmodernists exposed in *The Ideology of Tyranny* simply stems from the need to re-affirm the thesis of the book, which says that, despite the West's grandiloquent commitment to the "good," despite its professed adherence to "ethical ground rules," "Christian values," and whatnot, it truly believes in nothing of the sort — and the authors that are

variously valorised under its watch, above all these Neo-Gnostic postmodernists of one hue or another, provide ample and somewhat candid evidence that it is indeed so. My contention, in this sense, is that our termitary, or, in truth, most of the world's termitaries, but ours to the highest degree, are possessed instead of a devout creed in violence and domination, which their keepers veil, more or less capably, with various forms of hypocritical white-washing, one more repugnant than the next.

What we see as we course through Pessoa's political economy is that all things considered ugly and squalidly petty — indisputably. And, as disappointing as the realisation is — this is Pessoa, after all: the hip conqueror of dreamscapes (!)... —, there is still merit in taking the ride in that it forces us to come to blunt terms with a set of behavioural postures, with an ethos, which, as repulsive as it may appear at first, is, in fact, depressingly *ordinary*; it is prevalent if not universal: viz., mendacity and dissemblance as the default mode of social interaction, cautious selfishness, paroxysmal opportunism; cynicism scaffolded on the derision of all losers, weaklings and gulls; clannish racism, racial/national neurosis, vicarious ravings of supremacism and imperial expansion, privilege bestowed and the consequent rationalisation that it was acquired by right of (ancestral) superiority, monarchist yearning and deep fascination with all things dynastic and aristocratic, and

an overarching culture of contempt for whatever falls short of or opposes in whichever form the ends of the self-seeking “cultured” man of the middle-layer especially.

Such is the behavioural code of a barbarised middle-stratum, everywhere. We may speculate that with human beings such as these, (social) collapse is averted daily only by virtue of the parental bent in us. Perhaps. Thinkers like Pessoa would certainly downplay, if not dismiss entirely this bent's ethological importance by noting that its radius of nurturing agency is not only highly circumscribed, but that, much to the contrary, this affective impulse is ultimately a reinforcing sub-instinct that may be further primed for sublimating our sense of clannish belonging and our sentimental penchant for patriotic grandeur. For Neo-Gnostics, reasoned, poetised violence is the essence of vitality; there is not even dualism (God and the Devil as equals) in this simplified outlook.

Thorstein Veblen seemed to have implied (though I must confess I do not recall exactly where he might have suggested something along these lines) that, at the basic appetent level, eighty per cent of the world's psyches are more or less wired like Pessoa's. The question, then, is how the remaining twenty per cent of this world's souls are going to proceed in their effort, if such is the plan, to devise ways of rewiring the psyches of their fellow (barbarised) humans?

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