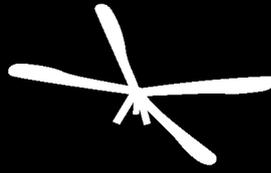


Hélice



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Valentí Almirall

«A Manuscript of a Wise Man or a Fool»

Introduction and Translation
by Todd Mack

Valentí Almirall i Llozer (1841-1904) was a late nineteenth-century Catalan lawyer, politician, and journalist. After studying at the Escola de Belles Arts of Barcelona, Almirall graduated from the Universitat de Barcelona with a law degree in 1863. An ardent Federalist, he participated in the 1868 Federal Revolt of Barcelona. Later, Almirall was fundamental in founding the Partit Republicà Federal and was director of the journal *El Federalista*. He was also involved in the *Revista Republicano-Federal*, and he founded the journal *El Estado Catalán* (1869-70, 1873). In 1878 Almirall published two political novels: *El alma al diablo* and *Una autoridad modelo*, and on May 4, 1879 in conjunction with the *Jocs Florals* he initiated the publication of the first newspaper written solely in Catalan: *El Diari Català*. The story you are about to read was published in issue 490 of that political and literary journal on December 16, 1880.

“A Manuscript of a Sage or a Fool” represents one of the first forays into the genre of science fiction in all of Catalan literature. In this short story Almirall describes a cosmic vision – a kind of sci-fi reimagining of the theological visions of writers such as Dante. Thus, while a work like the *Divine Comedy* reveals spiritual knowledge of a *different* world,

cosmic vision literature reveals scientific (or quasi-scientific) knowledge about *this* one.

Almirall did not sign the story with his own name, but with that of Thales of Miletus, a pre-Socratic thinker that Aristotle considered to be the first natural philosopher in the Greek tradition. Thales was famous for his emphasis on scientific rather than mythological explanations of nature, and his far-reaching intellectual pursuits led him to important discoveries and theories related to mathematics and astronomy. As a natural philosopher, Thales was instrumental in a movement away from mythological and towards scientific explanations for natural phenomena, and he was specifically interested in the ephemerality of matter.

In “A Manuscript” Almirall writes in the voice of an unknown narrator (not Thales), who, while wandering through the *encants* market in Barcelona, comes across a mysterious manuscript written in an unknown language. After much “hard work and patience” this narrator is finally able to translate a few passages of the text, whose narrator describes an experience *he* had while wandering on a Mediterranean beach, wondering what might have caused the Greeks and Romans to achieve their incredible heights of genius. Without warning, this second narrator then progressively and inexplicably is deprived of the use of his senses to the point where his completely disembodied conscious loses even the memory of ever having felt bodily sensations. In this



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purely Cartesian state, the unknown narrator then finds “supreme happiness” as he experiences the universe without temporal or spatial limits (what he calls “the great everything in its immense and infinite evolution”) and comes to see the great patterns of the universe. The vision ultimately leads the narrator of the manuscript to concede that the pride of man is absurd, and that the entire human race will eventually dissolve into nothing – an idea with which Thales would have likely agreed.

But what of Almirall himself? When he wrote “A Manuscript,” he was still furiously pursuing his political and cultural goals for Catalonia. In October of 1880 he had organized the First Catalanist Congress, and just two months later he published this very story in a newspaper that he himself founded with the express purpose of igniting a Catalan rebirth (*Renaixença*) through discussion of literature and politics. Indeed, Almirall seems like anything but a man convinced of the foolishness of human endeavors to build something lasting. Given that context, this short story about an enigmatic manuscript takes on its own mystery. Why did Almirall write it in the first place? Could he have been giving tentative voice to his own misgivings about the future of the endeavor in which he was engaged? Rather than a manifesto, could this story have been a barely conscious tapping of the philosophical brakes as Almirall contemplated just how puny even the greatest of human civilizations appear when viewed with an omniscient eye? It seems as if Almirall himself, in the very creation of this story, is wondering whether or not he himself is a wise man or a fool.

This short story represents unique challenges for translation because it is written in purposefully opaque prose. The main body of the text is itself meant to represent a rough and unsure translation, and I have done my best to retain that style in the English. Thus, while I have made a few small changes in syntax and lexicon for the sake of English readers, I have tried not to domesticate Almirall’s original Catalan and have intentionally left things unclear in places in which I believe he meant them to be so. In doing so, I can only wonder if I have been a wise man, or a fool. ●



Traducción de Todd Mack

Valentí Almirall
A Manuscript of a Wise Man or a Fool

One of my vices is that of going to the Barcelona flea market every day that it is open, in search of those bargains that can only be found in the flea market. I have found many of them there, but few as *original* as one I will have the pleasure of communicating today to the readers of the *Diari Català*. Among some old books that had belonged to a German who had just died, I found a manuscript with writing so strange that at first I believed it to be the work of a sage. I tried to decipher it and translate it, and with hard work and patience I have been able to bring to light the following passages.

DIGRESSIONS

It was summer, and I was traversing the most beautiful coasts of the Mediterranean Sea looking with eagerness for the reasons that have made them the privileged site of civilization in known history. The rays of the sun, which in past epochs gave to Greece and to Rome the warmth of inspiration, fermenting the geniuses that the pride of men calls immortals and which in times closer to ours have worked the miracle of making fecund and productive the very idea of Christianity, the most sterile and destructive of which the human race has conceived, fell perpendicularly upon my brain without my noticing, because of how absorbed in and drunk I was with my dreamy meditations. My gaze, short like that of any ordinary man since it can only take in a few kilometers in the immensity of the universe, hoped to extend beyond the horizons and discover the places that I glimpsed in my dreams: while my imagination, slave of time and of space, evoked the people that had moved in the same places in which I remained unmoved. Suddenly I felt struck by a very strange attack, which I have since tried to classify with the help of everything that has been written about pathology. The hours, the minutes, or the months – I could not even track clearly the time – that I stayed there standing on the sand, my human

nature completely lost, form today for me a confusing and indefinable record, but one so sweet, so soft, so vigorous, that as I try unfruitfully to penetrate its mystery I feel at once large and small, proud and humble, weak and strong.

A hundred times I have tried to take charge of it; a hundred times I have tried to communicate more impressions and a hundred times I have had to abandon the task. How can one explain the inexplicable? How to communicate through human language the impressions received when I had lost my human nature?

But I am a man, and I feel the characteristic pride of the order to which I belong. I am going to try it again for the hundred and first time.

At the moment I fell to the sand, a thick and dense fog came over my eyes, at the same time in which I noticed that my ears had been hermetically sealed. The two senses that a man most appreciates, since they are the ones that put him in most direct relation with space and time, disappeared completely, so completely, that I did not *see black* nor did I hear *silence*, as if I were seeing or hearing a memory as happens when we artificially deny ourselves the use of sight and ear, but that I could see and hear *nothing*. Not a memory was left to me that I had seen nor heard, and my brain was not conscious that it had ever been in relation with the exterior world through the ocular orbs, nor through the auditory conduits such that – to use a vulgar expression – I saw and heard through my eyes or my ears, the same thing that today I see and hear through my elbows or my back.

And what a strange thing! Upon finding myself in the miserable state of he who has been mute and blind since birth, the first sensation was the intimate satisfaction that a man feels when he acquires an idea that for him is completely new. That briefest of instances



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that made necessary the notion of seeing and hearing in order to erase them from my memory, was sufficient to open more potentialities and persuade me that those senses are only secondary. The king of human senses is that of touch, to which we perhaps do not pay attention because of the continuation and importance of the services it renders to us. Sight puts us in direct relation with space and hearing with time, but if we only had those two senses our notions of time and space would be very incomplete and imperfect.

But this intimate fruition lasted very little, since just as a veil had been placed over my eyes and a stopper in my ears, my sense of touch became useless and I was absolutely senseless; so absolutely that when I *awoke* from my illness I found my face covered in bruises and cuts. The lack of a sense of touch had made me try to lift myself from the ground by pressing my face against the sand, and had made it so I *did not feel* the obstacle that the immovable ground presented to me.

Along with my sense of touch I also lost my senses of smell and of taste, such that I became absolutely separated from the human world. The impressions that I had previously received were erased from my mind, and of time and of space I did not even conserve consciousness.

At this point begins the inexplicable. In the sad situation in which I found myself, like the man who has been born without any of the senses, I suddenly experienced a very strange *sensation* – I say sensation so we may understand each other. A new sensation had appeared to me that put me in relation with the universe, completely separated from the ideas of time and space. I could *see* and *hear* and *touch* everything – *in one mathematical point and instant*. Nothing had distance nor dates, and everything appeared to my brain to be *modified* in a way that was infinitely

more *clear* and more *precise* than when I had the use of the lost senses. Space and time had been, are, and will be the cause of the limitation of the faculties of human beings. The senses enslave these phantasmagorical conditions to everything they believe extends their knowledge.

How many unknown impressions did I feel in those *moments* of supreme happiness! The Universe without limits and without instants had no mysteries for me! The greatest elucubrations of the genius of men showed to my being all of their imperfections and their misery! *I heard* the human species, and it made me laugh. *I saw it from the beginning* – I must use human language, since I am once again a slave to time – *I saw it from the beginning* as stupid and without any knowledge of what surrounded it. *I could see it* later, in the pride of ignorance, come to suppose that it was the queen of the Universe and that all life was subordinate to its life. *I could see it* later, having arrived at its virile age, direct its impotent gaze to time and space, discovering in them only what was sufficient to fade its baseless and unfounded pride, but causing to be born in its spirit a new pride, just as unfounded and stupid as that which had barely faded. I could *see* that because it was fooled by the insignificant increase it had given to its senses through means that were relatively ingenious compared to its forces, came to believe that it was on the way to dominate nature and proclaimed indefinite progress. I saw it debating *always* in impotence, and trying, through its limited and enslaved senses, to arrive at the immensity and the infinite, words to them absurd, since they express ideas that they neither know nor can know. I *saw* it, then, miserable, emaciated, insignificant, such that, from the time I recovered human nature I have not been able to regain clear consciousness of it.



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I saw then the great everything in its immense and infinite evolution; I saw the absolute simplicity of material and of the immutable laws that govern it. To my view worlds were formed, they grew, they developed, they were in their apogee, they diminished, they decomposed, and they disappeared again in the immense everything of nature. To my view all material combined in an infinite variety of forms, giving place to manifestations of life that were likewise infinitely various. Everything was alive, everything moved; a man the same as a rock, the world in formation the same as the one in decomposition, since everything fulfilled fatally the law that imposed itself on all beings *large and small, old and young*.

Because my intelligence is served today by human senses, it is impossible to continue describing what in those moments it saw. I can only remember that the pride of man showed itself to me then to be a ridiculous and absurd thing. We are slaves to the general and absolute rule that the great everything moves and we must follow its inflexible prescriptions. The life of the most insignificant being is the synthesis of life in general and the small planet we inhabit follows the same evolutions that those infusoria, smaller than microscopic, that are born in a fraction of a second, fulfill their mission and die with vertiginous haste. The progress of the human species is, then, subject to the life of the planet it inhabits, just as the planet is to the system of which it forms a part, just as the system is to all other systems, which are the imperceptible link between the parts and the whole of nature. The law of selection and transformation will modify and improve our race as long as the earth has not arrived at the point that separates growth from decadence. As soon as it arrives at that point, life will take on new forms and man if he still conserves the pride of his race will

have to contemplate how, gradually and by almost imperceptible degrees, it loses what it had gained, until it returns to the point of its origin through *negative selection*, and the beings that are born after will be the only testimonies of the decomposition of the planet – that we believe we have adorned and perfected with the effort of our intelligence – as the infinitely small amount of material of which it is composed, passes to form part of new worlds and new forms, which will also follow immutably the fatal laws of nature...

To this point and no further, it has been possible for me to translate the manuscript that has stumped me for months and months. Its author still follows his elucubrations, but he has done it through signs that he has not been able to decipher even with the help of some of those friends of the kind who can read even the unknown characters of languages of which no knowledge remains, no matter how much some of these consultants, even though they do not understand them, assure me that they contain important and transcendent ideas. We do not have, then, more recourse than to leave its translation to some fortunate person who once again suffers the same mysterious illness of which the author of the manuscript was a victim, whom we repeat, we do not know whether to qualify as a sage or a fool.

José Maria Eça de Queirós

«The Catastrophe»

Introduction, Translation and Notes
by Rex P. Nielson

Few writers have expressed such acerbic wit and biting social critique as the nineteenth-century Portuguese novelist José Maria Eça de Queirós (1845–1900). In an age when dramatic political and social changes were occurring throughout Europe, Eça actively participated in Portugal’s tumultuous political and intellectual affairs resulting from the country’s liberal revolution and subsequent civil war (1828–34). As a diplomat and government official, Eça spent significant periods of time outside of Portugal, primarily in England and France, and from a distance he developed a cynical perspective towards his homeland. His novels and stories critique idleness, indolence, dishonesty, and moral decay. He viewed Portugal as backward and archaic, a country greatly in need of reform and renewal. Over time, however, and while living in Paris, he became similarly disillusioned with European elite society in general, and his writing exposes and criticizes hypocrisy, corruption and immorality in a multitude of characters regardless of national origin or social station.

A prolific writer, Eça published nearly a dozen novels and short story collections during his lifetime, and at the time of his untimely death, he left behind a considerable amount of unpublished

work.¹ In 1925, José Maria d’Eça de Queirós (1888–1928), Eça’s son who assumed responsibility for his father’s literary legacy and oversaw the republication of many of Eça’s novels, published an edition of his father’s unedited fiction that included a novel, *O Conde D’Abranhos*, and the short story “A Catástrofe” [The Catastrophe]. In a preface to his father’s work, the son confesses that both texts were unfinished drafts and that it would be inaccurate to say simply that the work “não foi revisto pelo autor” [had not been reviewed by the author] (5) when both texts had been left in unedited manuscript form.² Notably, the story “The Catastrophe,” had been written in pencil, and the handwriting was smudged, unclear at times, with some words abbreviated and others missing. The manuscript text was obviously provisional, incomplete, and in draft stage.

Elsewhere in his introduction, José Maria d’Eça de Queirós observes that the story was initially conceived as a study for a novel that was to be entitled,

1 For an excellent overview of Eça de Queirós’s work published during his lifetime and posthumously, see Carlos Reis, “O cânone da literatura queirosiana,” *Veredas* 8 (2007): 185–99.

2 José Maria D’Eça de Queirós, “Introdução: Dois Manuscritos a Lapis,” in *O Conde D’Abranhos Notas Biográficas por Z. Zagalo e A Catástrofe*, Eça de Queirós (Porto: Lello & Irmão, 1963).



The Catastrophe

A Batalha do Caia (18), but which was never completed. Eça himself described the novel in a letter sent to his friend Ramalho Ortigão, dated 10 November 1878,³ but all that exists of the unfinished work is an outline of the narrative's structure and, additionally, the short story "The Catastrophe," a relatively brief extrapolation of the novel's principal theme. Eça's son notes that this was a practice the author had employed elsewhere. For example, prior to composing *A Cidade e as Serras*, a novel that was published posthumously in 1901, Eça wrote an initial study in the form of a story, "A Civilização" (18). Thus, while "The Catastrophe" remained unpublished during the author's lifetime, it seems clear that Eça took a serious interest in the story's idea, which he was planning to develop at some point into a longer novel.

"The Catastrophe" adopts a literary strategy that may at first seem uncharacteristic of Eça's fiction. It belongs to a genre of fiction that Alan Freeland calls "future-war fiction that was so prolific in Europe and beyond in the years between the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71 and the outbreak of the Great War in 1914" (107). In "The Catastrophe," Eça imagines a post-war future in which Portugal has fallen to an enemy European power. Freeland notes that Eça follows a prototypical narrative structure in which a first-person narrator "looks back from a future situation of defeat and occupation, and points out how the disaster might have been avoided" (108). In this sense, the story might rightly be called futuristic and dystopian, as it imagines the consequences of a foreign invasion and the subsequent defeat and humiliation of the country. Nevertheless, in the course of narrating the events leading up to the invasion, the story also

adopts an objective posture from which it reflects upon the social and political circumstances that expedited the nation's capitulation. Thus, while imagining a post-war future reality in a manner atypical of Eça's style, the story also expresses the kinds of social critique and yearning for cultural renewal that so famously characterize Eça's more well-known works. Yet, from the shadows of Eça's duly recognized masterpieces, such as *O Crime do Padre Amaro*, *O Primo Basílio*, *Os Maias*, and *A Ilustre Casa de Ramires*, among others, "The Catastrophe" nonetheless merits consideration for its projection of a dystopian future in which the consequences of social decay, political corruption, and moral degradation must be faced.

For this translation, I have relied primarily upon the excellent critical edition prepared by Marie-Hélène Piwnik, with a preface by Carlos Reis.⁴ ●

4 Eça de Queirós, *Contos II*, edited by Marie-Hélène Piwnik, preface by Carlos Reis (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 2003).

3 Alan Freeland, "Imagined Endings: National Catastrophe in the Fiction of Eça de Queirós," *Portuguese Studies* 15 (1999): 105–118.



Traducción de Rex P. Nielson

José Maria Eça de Queirós
The Catastrophe

I live at the corner of the Pelourinho plaza⁵ right in front of the armory. Before the war, and our disasters, I was already living there on the second floor to the right; I never liked the place. Though not bucolic in nature, my ambition had always been to live far away from these sad streets in the Baixa,⁶ in a neighborhood with more air and more of a view, with a yard, trees, the freshness of foliage and a few meters of earth where I could rustle among trees, raise roses, and greet birds on summer afternoons. But when I received an inheritance from Aunt Petronilha, I bought this building in front of the armory. Because of the shops and stores on the ground floor, these sorts of houses bring in more rent than in other neighborhoods. A building in the Baixa is better than a beautiful house in the Buenos Aires⁷ or Janelas Verdes neighborhoods. At least

5 In his interesting *Handbook for Travellers in Portugal*, published in 1864, the Englishman John Murray provides the following detailed description of the Pelourinho plaza: "A Pelourinho was a pillar set up in the market or other principal place of a town or city to show that the corporation was invested with municipal rights. It generally consists of a column, more or less ornamented, and raised on several steps. These columns are very frequent throughout Portugal, and are often richly sculptured; they may easily be mistaken for a mutilated cross. At present, the only use to which they are applied is to receive the edicts and notices of the municipalities." (30). He continues: "Sometimes [used] as a place for the infliction of capital punishments. They were furnished at the top with four iron branches, having at their extremity a ring and a chain. This Largo is a moderate-sized square, having a portion of the arsenal on the S. and the Bank on the W. In the centre is the Pelourinho, a curious spirally twisted marble column, carved out of a single block, and now carrying an armillary sphere. Any member of the nobility who was condemned to death was executed on an apparatus attached to this sphere; but all traces of this employment have been removed" (30). John Murray, *Handbook for Travellers in Portugal: A Complete Guide for Lisbon, Cintra, Mafra, the British Battle-Fields, Alcobaca, Batalha, Oport, &c.* (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1864).

6 The Baixa, literally the "lower town," refers to Lisbon's traditional downtown area.

7 These neighborhoods are named respectively for the streets "Rua de Buenos Aires" located near the Estrela Basílica

that is the advice more experienced property owners gave me.

Later, I was tempted to rent out the building and go live with Maria and with my brother in a little house, happy and cool, that I had fancied over in Vale de Pereiro. But when disaster struck, and the enemy army occupied Lisbon, economic needs in such difficult times forced me to abandon this plan to go live in the country, and so here I am on this sad second floor in the Pelourinho plaza right in front of the armory. I came to live here in unfortunate circumstances, and because of this the armory district has caused me to feel with greater intensity all the bitterness of the invasion. Those who live, for example, over in Buenos Aires, Janelas Verdes, or Vale de Pereiro, of course suffer painfully with the presence of a foreign army in Lisbon, although the initial terror has passed and the city is regaining its ordinary appearance little by little and the *tramways*⁸ and the carts are running again; nevertheless, there is something that weighs upon the city, the air is heavy with something subtle and oppressive, like an intolerable atmosphere, which flows through the plazas, penetrates homes, affects the taste of the water, and seems like a dark gas, resting in the soul like a constant and dry sadness. When someone goes out and, feeling distracted by some errand, happens to forget the great calamity that has enveloped us, the mere sight of a uniformed enemy soldier standing on a corner immediately brings back to the soul the weight of a rock, the memory of defeat, and the end of the homeland. I don't know what it is but, for example, as long as a foreign flag flies from the top of a building, it seems that the blue above us no longer belongs

and the "Rua das Janelas Verdes," which today runs near the Museu de Arte Antiga. Both streets now make up part of the Lapa district in Lisbon, a traditional neighborhood that during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was home to many aristocratic and noble families.

8 In the original, the author uses the term "tramways" in English in reference to the city's extensive trolley system.



The Catastrophe

to our sky, it's something like a London fog. But at least in other homes, in other neighborhoods, you can hide in your home and escape this bleak environment. Though there is no homeland, there is family; close the doors, gather in the living room, and around the family hearth, you can talk; the memory of the misfortune serves as a pungent relief; the perspective of hope eludes us like a fleeting happiness; you recall the friends and neighbors who died bravely in the battles; sometimes the memory of a heroic deed provides the feeling of honor retained; afterwards, around the light of the lamp, in low voices and with the shudders of your whole being, the family engages in a little conspiring... And the dream of revenge gives strength to bear the reality of the catastrophe. But I'm not even allowed this isolation because unless the windows are closed and I'm enveloped in constant darkness except for a gas light, while the light of July sparkles outside, I cannot help but see before me, like a hateful memento, the door of the armory and the foreign sentinel standing on the homeland... And it is precisely this sentinel who grates on me. Of course other foreign uniforms, belonging to armed officers going to and from the dock, pass by all the time in the brilliant insolence of their spectacular uniforms. But this doesn't bother me... There is in that coming and going of officials something of hurriedness, of unsettledness, that gives me the idea of a transitory occupation, or of squadrons ready to weigh anchor, or of humiliations that will leave forever. But that sentinel, eternal, who always appears to me to be the same, has an air of immutability, of perpetuity, and turns my heart dark: each stride he takes with the hard sole of his boot, falls on my soul with a chilling echo, and his monotonous walk, from sentry post to sentry post, gives me the sensation that there will never cease to exist a foreign sentinel on Portuguese soil. And I cannot turn away from this spectacle! In the morning, while shaving, I pause with razor in hand, face lathered in foam, and I watch,

astonished, the small soldier dressed in a blue overcoat with a leather-varnished cap, his weapon resting on his soldier—one of those rifles with a range twice as far as ours that massacred entire regiments from a distance! And now I already recognize nearly all the sentinels at the armory. For a few days, they were navy officers, but now they are always from the infantry. Moreover, there is a certain type of soldier who provokes me: it's the strapping young man, robust, solid, firmly planted on both legs, with a set face and glistening eye. I always say this was what beat us; and I recall our own soldier, untrained, dirty, shrunken, sickly, wearied from the poor air of the barracks and insalubrity of the camps. I see in their superiority of kind and race the entire explanation for the catastrophe. In the past, before the invasion, I can hardly remember having seen the armory sentinel; but I can recall having seen him, by chance, when I came to the window. If it was raining, he could always be seen in the sentry house, staring sadly at the downpour of water. If it was calm outside, his walk and the tired slump of his shoulders, the sluggish softness of his step, were a constant and obvious expression of boredom and fatigue. Later, at the end of two hours of service, it was all exhaustion, brutalization, an indolent way of seeing everything that passed: the oxen, the fishmongers, the peddlers, the shop across the way, revealing their lack of nerves, vigor, discipline, strength, and persistence. And this image of the soldier then seems to extend and encompass the entire city, the entire country. It was because of this gloomy sleepiness, this tedium, this lack of decision, of energy, of will, that I believe we lost ourselves... Sometimes, I hear in my mind the accusations repeated so often during the time of fighting: we did not have an army, or regiments, or artillery, or defense, or weapons... false! What we didn't have were souls! That's what was dead, extinguished, asleep, denationalized, uncertain. When in a State the souls become aged and spent, what is left matters very little.



The Catastrophe

I will never forget the impression I had on the day I learned that war had been declared and that an invading army had been organized and was approaching from the south and from the north. It was the birthday of my poor friend Nunes, who was then living in Rossio. Beginning in the afternoon, a panic fell upon the city. Because the truth is that even since the war had begun in Europe, so violently provoked by Germany's invasion of Holland, never in Lisbon, at least among the majority of the public, had there been any fear that the thing *might come to our corner*, as they said at the time. Not even when old Lord Salisbury, nearly on his death bed, released his great manifesto and declared war on Germany, and when we saw our only protector become so occupied in the battles of the North, we hardly thought we were in danger. Nevertheless, it seemed that the terrible day had arrived in which small nationalities would disappear from Europe... That's why on that fatal afternoon, when the announcement was made of the entry of an enemy army at the border, the whole city fell petrified in terror. And the first act of the population was to run to the churches! Can you imagine it, seeing the enemy regiments spreading out through the streets? And I don't think there was even the idea of a serious resistance. First they said we would try to give battle, either in Caminho or in Tancos, just to show Europe that we had some vitality left, but it was just a demonstration, because the idea was that we would draw back our lines to Torres Vedras and defend Lisbon. What next? I was not present for the secrets shared by the head of defense or for any of the government councils, and I only know what was said by groups who filled the streets, terrified, speaking low. That night I went to Rossio.⁹ Nunes was having a *soirée*, but the room was clouded with the

same sullen sadness of the streets. There was in every face, every voice, a wild expression of amazement and terror, a singular way of asking *now what?* with wide eyes set in a pallid face. Although there were two rooms, one for visitors and one for games, everyone gathered around the sofa like a flock sensing the wolf nearby. The lady of the house, who had a son who was at the military station in Tancos, had an expression of mourning, in spite of her blue low-cut dress, her eyes red and swollen. She had cried all day. And the ladies, the men, displayed a dispiritedness, a mute acceptance of future defeat, an inherent passivity, of weak souls. Because there was no news, the rumors were absurd, and all the time there were silences, dreadful silences that gave the sensation of a ceremonial withdrawal on the day of a burial. Poor Nunes, very pale, walked around the room, the tails of his dress-coat flapping, nervously wringing his hands, wanting to distract everyone from their painful worries, proposing that we do something... there was a request for a quadrille... someone sat at the piano, but the first beats of the cavalry sounded from outside and were then lost in the general murmur of panicked conversation; no couples formed; no one danced. Someone suggested a game of charades, and frightened faces smiled and said with effort:

—Let's play. Not a bad idea...

But all stayed sitting, with hands inert, feet heavy.

I had come to the house to speak with some people. There were journalists, politicians, and through everyone's speech, you could feel the dispiritedness of soul. No one believed in a possible resistance; and in the face of the danger, self-interest rose up, ferocious and brutal. The hatred for the enemy was violent—less because of the possible loss of a free country but rather for the private disasters that it would bring; one worried for his job, another for the interest of his investments. Up to that point, the State had given bread to the country—and with the loss of the State, one contemplated the

⁹ Rossio Square is the common name of the Pedro IV Square located in downtown Lisbon. It has been one of the main squares and gathering areas in Lisbon since at least the thirteenth century. It has also been the setting for numerous popular revolts and celebrations.



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loss of our daily bread. But these expressions of indignity seemed to drain the entire amount of patriotism that could be given to those souls, because in response to each question that suggested a frightened fantasy—give up the colonies in exchange for an immediate alliance with the English and make concession of two provinces—there was deep down the immutable idea of capitulation, the horror of fighting, the anxiety of losing one's job, and losing the interest from an investment. And moreover, each person feeling the selfish weakness of his soul instinctively judged the country to be taken by this same dismay. The idea of rising up en masse and creating a mobile guard, militias, was met with a shrugging of shoulders. What for? Nothing can be done! We are overwhelmed.

I remember that while they were speaking this way, at the foot of the gambling table, where the forgotten cards of the old sleepy game of Voltarete lay, I went to the window. The entire vast sky was obscured with a white fog, but through the Arch of the Bandeira there expanded a vast blue space, like the circular entrance of an immense portico, and in the center of the arch was a large moon, a sad moon, mute and livid, and the hill to the side with its castle was partially blocked in the darkness, with its sloping line and the pale blue in the background. An immense sadness seemed to emerge from that decoration, and the soul was invaded as if by the vague piety of a disgraced country. Without knowing why, I suddenly felt overcome with longing, a longing for something that had disappeared, that had ended forever, and that I could not explain. Below, the darkened Rossio glistened silently among the illuminated lines of the storefronts. The plaza surrounding the column, which the moonlight cast in a pale trace, darkened with people, but there was not one cry, not one voice. A dark mass of people seemed to be sleeping there, gathered in the instinctive terror that brings animals together, resignedly waiting for the torment. And from the white houses, tall and towering, fell the

same sensation of terrified abstention, of selfish concentration in a dark fear. Suddenly, from the side of the Rua do Almada, came a sound, like a rhythmic musical accompaniment carried in the air. The lights of approaching torches, creating a tail of sparks, appeared at the corner of Rossio plaza, and a group emerged, marching lively to the beat of a patriotic hymn, whose rhythm stirred them to broad quick steps:

*War, war, it's holy war
For holy independence...*

They numbered perhaps twenty, and seemed, from above, from the window, with their tall hats, perhaps to be young men from the schools or one of the youth associations that abounded in the city. They continued along through Rossio, agitated, voices raised in an appeal to the dark multitude; but no cries answered them; the people crowded together to watch those enthusiastic, solitary young men pass by, and then the stores turned off their lights, closing abruptly. In the cold silence coming from the people's indifference and muteness of the storefronts, it seemed that the song was extinguished, the enthusiasm waned like a flag falling limply at the mast. When they drew near the Dona Maria Theater, their hymn could barely be heard, and the torches grew dim, and then they disappeared altogether, lost in the darkness like an ephemeral gesture of heroism amid the vast public indifference. I drew back from the window, thinking, with my throat closed, that we were lost forever. Finally, as the night drew on, something had to be done to dispel that atmosphere of fear. Nunes, Correia, and I played Voltarete. In the other room, they felt a similar need to shake off the terror-stricken torpor of the ladies; someone played a scale on the piano, a few muted chords, and then a voice I recognized, from a cavalry officer, softly and mournfully began reciting *The Jewess*:



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Sleep, while I watch, beguiling image

Then that melody, that melancholic voice of longing, seemed to me to be singularly strange in that hour; it was like an archaic vestige, a voice from an extinct world, passing in dreams. Around the table, the monotonous voices continued: Pass, I'll deal the cards. Below, from the Rossio Square, came the same hushed murmurs of the multitude filling the plaza; and in the living room, to the tender languor of the accompaniment, swaying with sentimental expression, the voice of the officer:

Sleep, while I watch, beguiling image

While in that very hour, the enemy army marched on the soil of the homeland. The poor lieutenant! We ran into each other later. I was with my companions from the national militia. And what a militia: all we had for a uniform was an improvised overcoat! What weapons: just hunting rifles! But there we were on that cold April morning in a torrential rain. It seems that there was a great battle going on, but we knew nothing. There we were, halfway up a hill within view of an abandoned country house. We had been there for two hours, in mud up to our knees, soaked to the skin with water after having marched all night, dumb with fatigue, starving, leaning on each other to keep from falling asleep, while all around us, from the low and gloomy sky fell the rain. The house with its four trees, enveloped entirely in the rain, seemed as shriveled and sleepy as we were, and in the distance the artillery thundered. At times, the shots seemed to burst suddenly like the tearing of a great piece of silk, but we could not see the smoke in the darkness of the air and the rain. And I don't even know where we were or what we were defending. Leading the company was the same lieutenant, the very officer who recited *The Jewess*. Yellow, frozen, shrunken in his coat, he walked by, but there

he did not appear to be the same man who twirled his mustache at the piano, rolling his tender eyes at the most touching moments. Suddenly, along the wet earth, at a gallop came an officer, dry, with an unbuttoned uniform, sword in hand, his face aflame with the fury of battle; a beautiful young man, blood dripping from his ear. He reigned in his horse and cried out in a voice of rage:

—Who commands this detachment?

—I do, my captain, the other responded, standing upright.

—With a thousand devils! Turn around, to the left, behind the house, and take up a position on the road, in the ditch.

And he left, at a gallop. And so we moved too, marching, marching, in the mud where our feet sunk in, requiring a brutal effort to cross that earth, gasping for breath in the torrents of rain, as the roar of the artillery seemed to draw nearer. We passed in front of the house, and at the door, we could see the ambulance carts, and inside the cries of the wounded. It was the first time we had heard those harrowing sounds, and through the detachment spread a feeling of imprecision, of hesitation: it was our civilian flesh, our bourgeois blood, that recoiled from that sudden evidence of death and pain!

—March, screamed the lieutenant!

We reached the road, but we saw nothing. In front was a pallid line of poplars, and then small hills, a small chapel at the top of a mount, and throughout the rustic valley the harsh fog of incessant rain. We stopped. In the distance, another detachment appeared. We stayed there, in that same immobility, wet, shivering, exhausted almost to death. Not even a drop of brandy. Our swollen feet in water-logged boots tortured us! And thinking about the days of peace, when I would watch the rain while sitting in the armchair of my office, there came upon me a furious rage for the foreigner, a furor to keep marching, a brutal desire for



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carnage. And it made me feel desperate to stay there, criticizing, in the hallucinations of desperation, the generals, the government, everyone who was above me and who didn't order me to march. That indecision was odious. Our uniforms became glued to our bodies, and we felt the water running down the length of our legs, our hands freezing to the barrel of the rifle, in the sharp wind blowing through the valley. Suddenly, a stifled sound. It was the drums of the artillery, beating, calling soldiers to take up position. And like a whirlwind, screaming between the fog of the rain and the mud, amid the confusion of the horses, the jerking of the wagons, in a furious cracking of whips, rushing over the soupy earth... Suddenly, to our right, the rifles began to shoot; we now felt the whistling of bullets. Instinctively, we fell to the ground, in the cowardly retreat of a callow militia.

—Steady! yells the lieutenant.

In front of me, a uniformed soldier falls into the mud, motionless, dead. Now we see little plumes of grey smoke lifting; the rain puts them out; the wind carries them away. The lieutenant abruptly reels and falls to one knee. He's been wounded in his arm, but he stands again and waves his sword like a madman, screaming:

—Fire!

I cannot recall much after this. The tremendous sound of the artillery disoriented me. It's like in a dream, as if sleepwalking, and I'm shooting randomly at dark smoke, which covers everything before me. Suddenly, the lieutenant falls again and flounders on the ground, crying out in the fury of agony:

—I've been shot, boys! I've been shot, boys!

But it was in that moment that we felt surrounded, engulfed by a dark matter that fell upon us in a burst, violently. We fled, running, firing our rifles, in the midst of deafening yells. Later, I have the vague memory that the large mass of people split apart and dispersed. About a hundred of us ran through the middle,

falling, getting up, rolling in the mud, trampled on. I am vaguely aware that this is the defeat, the rout, the panic of militias, and I flee with a terrible bitterness, yelling without knowing why, desperate to find some corner, a house, a hole. And I remember seeing a wagon before me with an officer, bare-headed, disheveled, and firm, yelling with open mouth, waving his sword, trying to halt the desperate stampede, but the mass of people fell upon him, knocking him down, and I vaguely feel my own boots stepping on his inert and smashed body. Oh cursed war! How I returned to Lisbon and found himself at home—I truly cannot remember. Yes, I recall stopping in Rossio, and seeing it filled with a horrible multitude, the entire population of the surrounding area which had fled before the enemy. It was a chaos of wagons, cattle, furniture, women screaming, a brutal and terrified mass, swirling around itself, crying out for bread beneath the relentless rain. It was in Lisbon that I pieced together the details: the enemy squadrons entered from the Tagus, the city was without water because the Alviela canal had been cut off, insurrection spread through the streets, the frightened public flying to the churches, asking for weapons, and adding to the confusion of the invasion, the horrors of demagoguery. Bitter days. All my hair grew grey.

And to think that for years we could have prepared ourselves. And to think how like England, we could have created volunteer corps, training each citizen as a soldier and thus preparing in advance a great national army of defense, armed, equipped, disciplined, and having developed the habit of discipline, pride for the uniform...

But what does it matter now to think about what could have been done! Our great defect, I repeat, was the despondency, the inertia of our souls! For a time, all the blame was cast on the government! A grotesque accusation that none would dare repeat today. The politicians could perhaps have created more artillery,



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or more and more ambulances, but what they could not have created was a vigorous soul for the country. We had fallen into indifference, into imbecilic skepticism, into disgust for all ideas, into repugnance for all efforts, into invalidation of will. We were broken, malnourished, diseased. The government, the Constitution, that same document so derided, gave us everything that it should have: freedom. And it was to the shelter of this freedom that the nation, the country, the mass of citizens had the duty to make their country more prosperous, alive, strong, worthy of independence... But the country had not lost its habit of living at the door of the convents, and once the convents were gone, the people had turned to the government, waiting for the government to give what they should have taken for themselves, asking the government to do what they themselves should do! They wanted the government to clear and cultivate their fields, to create their industries, to write their books, to feed their children, to build their buildings, to give them the idea of God. Always the government! The government should be the farmer, the industrialist, the banker, the philosopher, the priest, the painter, the architect—everything. When a country thus abdicates to the government all of its initiative and folds its arms and waits for civilization to fall ready-made into its lap, like the light that comes from the sun, then this country is ill. Souls lose their strength, arms lose the habit of work, conscience loses its discipline, the mind loses action. And because the government is there to do everything, the country stretches out in the sun, grows comfortable and goes to sleep. Wake up, like we woke up, with a foreign sentinel at the door to the armory. Oh, if we had only known!

But we know now! Oh, this city seems so different. Gone is that beaten and mournful multitude from Rossio on the eve of the catastrophe. Now one sees in the gait, in the look, on the face, a decision. Each eye shines with a fire, restrained but brave. And each

chest lifts as if it now truly contained a heart! That base idleness is no longer seen in the city; everyone has the occupation of a duty: the women seem to feel their responsibility and they are mothers because they have the duty of raising citizens. Now we read our history, now we work, and the same facades of homes no longer have that stupid appearance of faces without ideas like on that night. Also, when the light shines, now behind each window you can feel a united family, strongly organized.

For me, every day, I take my children to the window, I sit them on my knees, I show them the sentinels. I show them how they walk slowly from sentry post to sentry post in the shadow cast by the building in the hot July sun, and I imbibe them with horror, with hatred for that foreign soldier. I then tell them the story of the invasion, the disgrace, the frightening episodes, the bloody chapters, the sinister history. Then I turn their attention to the future and make them yearn for the day when in their house, from this window, they will see a Portuguese sentinel standing guard on Portuguese territory. And I show them the sure way and what we should have done: work, believe, and because our land is small, our activity must be great, through work, through freedom, through science, through the strength of our soul. And I teach them to love their country rather than to disparage it like many others did in the past, as I recall. We would go to the cafes, to *Gremio*,¹⁰ cross our legs, and between puffs of smoke say indolently:

—This is rubbish! This is worthless! This is a shameful country... it's falling into the hands of others...

And rather than trying to save it, we would ask for more cognac and go out to the brothels. Oh you generation of cowards, you were punished well!

10 The *Grémio Literário* is a social club and reading room located in Chiado. Founded in 1846 and still in operation, the club included writers such as Almeida Garrett and Alexandre Herculano among its first members. Noted for its elegant salons, the *Grémio* has always been a gathering point of Lisbon's social elites.



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But now this generation is different, which does not mean that all is lost. Be quiet and wait. Though it may not be spirited, it is focused. And afterward not all is sadness. We also have our festivals. And everything is worthy of celebration: December 1, the signing of the constitution; July 24,¹¹ anything really as long as it celebrates a national date. Not in public. We can't yet celebrate it in public, but each in his home, at his table. Put out more flowers in vases, decorate the linen with some greenery, put out some evidence of the old beautiful flag, the shields¹² we used to mock, and now make us tender. And then, as a family, we'll sing softly, in order to avoid the attention of spies, the old hymn, the hymn of the Constitution, any hymn. And all will give a great toast for a better future. And there will be one consolation, one secret joy, knowing that at the same hour in nearly every building of the city, the new generation is celebrating inside, almost religiously, the old festivals of the nation. And later in the evening, surrounding the hearth, like a lesson on national history, I will tell my boys this story, the story of a patriot.

11 The Portuguese Civil War, also known as the Liberal Wars, lasted from 1828 to 1834 as liberal constitutionalists fought with authoritarian absolutists over royal succession in Portugal. The date 24 July 1833 was the day that the Duke of Terceira captured Lisbon, thus ensuring victory for the Liberals, though the conflict would not officially end until the following year.

12 From 1830 to 1910, Portugal's flag featured a vertical blue-white bicolor design with the royal coat of arms in the center. In the middle of the coat of arms are five shields. The current national flag is similarly divided between two colors, red and green, and it also shows the national coat of arms with the five shields. The small blue shields represent five Moorish kings and are associated with the "Miracle of Ourique," a major military victory in which Afonso Henriques and his soldiers were inspired by an appearance of Christ on the cross and defeated a much larger enemy army of moors supposedly led by five kings. The shields thus symbolize Portugal's claim of divine intervention.

José Fernández Bremón

«Health Scare»

Introduction and Translation
by Daryl Hague

Born in Gerona, Spain, in 1830, José Fernández Bremón was an accomplished writer. In addition to working for a variety of newspapers and magazines, he published poems, plays, and short stories. These works revealed his sharp wit and a gift for satire. Most interesting for present purposes, he wrote several stories that qualify as early science fiction, including “M. Dansant, médico aerópata” (“Monsieur Dansant, Aeropathic Doctor”), “Un crimen científico” (“A Scientific Crime”), and “El terror sanitario.”

In 1905, Fernández Bremón published “El terror sanitario,” which I have translated as “Health Scare,” in an annual newspaper known as *El almanaque de la Ilustración* [*The Almanac of the Enlightenment*]. Given how relentlessly the story critiques Modernist faith in science, this choice of venue is fascinating.

The story develops as a series of vignettes. Many are laugh-out-loud hilarious, a few gravely serious, but all of them combine to paint a picture of faith in science run amok. This faith is based on an exaggerated approach to the germ theory of disease, which had enjoyed barely fifty years or so of wide acceptance before the publication of “El terror sanitario.”

“El terror sanitario” introduces readers to a dystopian future in which the Spanish government de-

clares an unusual war on disease. After determining that microbes create all sickness, the government adopts a two-pronged approach to protecting public health: (1) imposing all possible measures to ensure a sterile environment; and (2) killing anyone who commits the crime of becoming sick. The story ends as the country’s president touts what he considers a great success: the government eliminates yellow fever by incinerating a Chinese man.

The incident with the Chinese man reflects late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century fears about Asian immigrants invading Europe, a fear articulated in 1895 by Germany’s Kaiser Wilhelm II as the “yellow peril.” Examples of European literary works that both support and critique this fear abound, so Fernández Bremón’s oblique reference to it fits well with the cultural milieu of his time.

Even as “El terror sanitario” addresses such contemporary issues as the “yellow peril,” the story is also remarkably prophetic, anticipating both the horrors of the Shoah and Western cultural values of the twenty-first century. As to the Shoah, the Spanish government forces sick people to wear a small yellow flag, just as the Nazis would require Jews to wear yellow stars. Furthermore, in the interests of cleanliness and efficiency, the Spanish government uses enormous ovens in which to incinerate the sick. With respect to twenty-first-century cultural values, “El terror sanitario” is particularly prescient about Western obsessions with human



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health. Consider the modern proliferation of nutritional supplements, personal trainers, and fitness programs, all promising perfect bodies and the happiness that supposedly accompanies perfect health.

Happiness is the ostensible goal behind the government's health policy in "El terror sanitario." That policy aggressively limits human intimacy. In one humorous vignette, an engaged couple shares a kiss while separated by a window. In another, a priest is allowed to hear confessions only via a sanitary wireless telegraph. These and the many other vignettes in "El terror sanitario" invite readers to contemplate the link between human intimacy and happiness. Indeed, the story's true health scare seems to be the possibility that people will deliberately reject intimacy and therefore the opportunity for genuine well-being.

In my translation, I have not sought to domesticate Fernández Bremón's story. For that reason, I have tried to retain his rhetorical patterns, particularly his sentence length. Spain's main legislative body appears as the "Congress of Deputies" rather than "Parliament" or "Congress," as the latter terms would transfer the story's action either to the United Kingdom or the United States. Even though the story is speculative, it is most definitely a Spanish story that takes place in Spain, and I wanted English-speaking readers to have the opportunity to experience that difference. ●



Traducción de Daryl Hague

José Fernández Bremón
Health Scare

The health revolution had been accomplished to shouts of “Death to the sick!” and “Down with all cures!” Several things had precipitated this explosive change: first, the discovery of *salutina*, a disinfectant so powerful that it had driven all flies, mice, and cats from Spain; second, the public certainty that every disease resulted from malevolent microbes that could easily break out and enter the human body, especially given that the pores provided as many openings as a sieve; third, the fear of death, as natural in human beings as their acceptance of other people’s deaths; fourth, and last of all, the grandiose justification that the human race could be regenerated only by preserving the healthy and destroying the sick. Every town established a quarantine hospital and the law prohibited all diseases, although migraine headaches for women and simple colds for men were still allowed. The law also made an exception for baldness and warts, these being recognized as elements of personal ornamentation and therefore pertaining to the fine arts.

I

EXCERPT FROM A MINISTRY NEWSPAPER

Yesterday in the Congress of Deputies, the leader of the opposition party learned a terrible lesson that demonstrated just how unpopular his ideas are. Murmurs and insults could be heard throughout his speech, particularly when he made the following statement: “I don’t reject the need for rational health practices, such as wise and reasonable efforts to avoid preventable disease, keep our cities sanitary, and ensure that our homes and bodies are clean, but I detest the fear you use to terrorize the fainthearted. I refer to the public-health tyranny you promote in the name of your fantasies, ... of your mistakes about sanitation. Centuries will pass by, yet you will never know the exact cause of all disease. If you sanitize the air,

germs will fall from the clouds, or breed in the sun’s rays, or introduce themselves—like traitors—into the food you eat, or sprout from the ground wherever you step, or even be born from your favorite vices. You will develop theories that will be destroyed by other theories, forever pursuing a phantom, and the only thing you will achieve is to make existence bitter, to make the world grieve, ... by frightening our people with the bogeyman of cleanliness...”

He was unable to conclude his speech: the crowd’s whistles drowned out his voice and he fled, abandoned by his own supporters, running through a line of raised fists... that fell upon his back more than once.

Then the president arose, angry and terrible. “I will purge this nation of disease no matter the cost!” he shouted to thunderous applause, a sound like the roar of the ancient darkness. “If my own son gets sick, I will throw him out of the house! If a representative from the majority suddenly loses weight, he will be kicked out of the party! Our medical schools will teach pathology because we have to understand disease in order to seek it out. But the schools will teach nothing of medical treatment, for we will not cure anyone. Doctors must renounce that role. They are agents of the health police, nothing more. We are not tyrants. Individuals are free to get sick, but the State defends itself by eliminating every manifestation of disease. With the combination of *salutina*, which is now available to everyone; our great ovens; and the sanitation dictatorship, anyone who gets sick is a criminal, an enemy. Using the cell system, I’ll order houses isolated from houses and individuals from their families, and with the requirement that everyone wear gloves, I’ll isolate fingers from fingers. From this day forward, hospital funds will be used to exterminate the sick.”

An enthusiastic but hygienic ovation followed. Rather than moving too close to the president, congressional deputies formed a wide circle so as to avoid contaminating him.



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II

“Sir,” said a guard as he detained a man who was walking by, limping, “your proof-of-good-health card.”

“I left it at home.”

“Of course. Stick this little yellow flag on your hat and go on.”

“Home?”

“No, to the quarantine hospital.”

“But I’m not sick.”

“That’s what they all say. Move!”

“Can’t you see that I have a bad leg?”

“What I see is that you’re beginning to confess your health problems. Now move!”

“At least let me say hello to my friend over there.”

“All right, but no shaking hands. If you do, I’ll arrest him too.”

But there was no need. The friend, having seen the little yellow flag in his friend’s hat, moved out of sight, taking advantage of the cover afforded by a passing group of local firemen.

“Is there a fire?” the arrested man asked the guard.

“Not yet, but there’s going to be.”

“How do you know?”

“Because I heard them give the order. Two or three people who were reading at the National Library came down with pneumonia, so the government has ordered the firemen to burn the building to the ground. Now that’s enough talk. Off to the quarantine hospital!”

III

At public dances there are no cloakrooms; instead, there are decontamination rooms for men and women. Slow dancing is prohibited. The man and the woman must remain four meters apart, aerial and fan dancing being the only officially approved dances. A line of doctors stands watch over the dancers to protect the nation’s health.

In the coffee shops, every cup contains enough anti-toxins to prevent customers from getting sick.

At elegant New Year’s Eve parties, men hold onto women with steel tongs to avoid infection, and special rackets are used to launch small hygiene books and other healthy toys into the air.

The belief in disinfectants is so entrenched that no one blows their own brains out without first sterilizing the bullet.

IV

“Doctor,” says an ex-patient to his ex-physician, “how is our public health?”

“Couldn’t be better. There’s not a single sick person in all of Madrid: We’ve burned 11,000 people alive this month. Yesterday, I sent ten of my friends to the flames.”

“They must suffer terribly.”

“To the contrary. The oven is set at 1500 degrees. Inside there’s a slide—a Russian mountain—and at the top of it there’s a cushioned platform on which we lay the patient. The platform tips over and the sick person feels a pleasant tickling sensation, then falls into the flames and instantly transforms from solid to gas without feeling anything.”

“But come now, just between us, don’t you think such measures are excessive?”

“Not at all. Back in the old days when we used to operate on people, we had to wash up first so that the wounds wouldn’t get infected. What do you deduce from that?”

“Nothing pleasant.”

“That the most healthy man in the world is also poisonous.”

“No!”

“Yes. You, me, our families, we’re all worse than scorpions. Basic hygiene and daily baths aren’t enough. To avoid causing harm, even the healthiest man should be soaking for five hours a day.”



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V

The deputy mayor enters the church and asks the sacristan imperiously: "Where is the parish priest?"

"I have no idea, Sir."

"Fine. He's been avoiding me. Have you obeyed my orders? Has the holy water been boiled to ensure that it's safe? Are you going to answer me? Haven't the confessionals been removed yet? What about the new laws?"

"But, Sir, how will our people go to confession?"

"The law is clear: From now on, people can confess only by wireless telegraph."

VI

An engaged couple is talking alone.

"Do you love me, Lili?"

"Don't I let you hold my hand without disinfecting you first? Doesn't that prove something? Have you washed thoroughly, husband of mine?"

"Surely you don't think I would have exposed your life to any risk. Do you, my love?"

"Only three days before our wedding..."

"What a great day it will be! We'll go from the church to the civil registry, then to the municipal laboratory. The law requires that couples be completely decontaminated when they get married. I am almost your husband, and I have the right to give you a kiss on the forehead."

"Never. My father has studied human lips under a microscope, and he has told me about the horrors that reside there."

"Get behind that window."

"But why? I already am."

"Stick your forehead against it."

"Done."

The future groom went around to the opposite side of the window and kissed the glass.

VII

The streets are usually deserted because people are always trying to avoid each other, but the other day saw some excitement. In fact, there was a riot: A crowd tried stoning a stranger to shouts of "The man with jaundice must die!", "He has yellow fever, not jaundice!", and "To the quarantine hospital!" The authorities stopped the man from being lynched. Taken to the Russian mountain, he managed to explain with some difficulty that he was a foreigner. He was made to understand that he was subject to the laws of the land, and once he had accepted that fact, he was placed on the platform that would turn over and send him falling to a destination he knew nothing about. When he said "I'm a Chinese citizen," his yellow color was explained. Nevertheless, the signal had already been given, and no one could stop the platform from rotating toward the fire that vaporized the sick. We can only hope that the divine Fu has gathered up his ashes!

When the president was informed about this incident, he asked: "Didn't the doctors examine him?"

"Because we've simplified administrative tasks, we've put an end to all kinds of procedures."

"Right, right, simplicity above all else. But did he have yellow fever?"

"No, Sir."

"Not even jaundice?"

"He was a healthy Chinese man."

"Well, that makes sense... for him. But at least we've put an end to the yellow threat for now."

Pompeu Gener

«The Theological Palace»

Introduction, Translation and Notes
by Todd Mack

Pompeu Gener i Babot (also known at times as Peius) (Barcelona, 1848 - Barcelona, 1920), was a well-known and well-connected modernist *homme de lettres*. While probably best known today for his strong Catalanism, Gener was at times a journalist, essayist, playwright, bohemian and politician who participated in both the Federalist Revolution of 1868 and Almirall's First Catalanist Congress in 1880. Despite Peius' love for Catalonia, he spent much of his life outside of his mother land, living for long periods of time in Paris and traveling through Europe — even making his way to Asia and Africa in 1874.

Originally written in Catalan and compiled in *Pensant, sentint i rient* (1910), Gener translated this short story into Castilian and included it in another collection of his short stories entitled *Del presente, del pasado y del futuro* (1911). “The Theological Palace” can be broken into two parts. In the first, we find ourselves having traveled in Verne's time machine to New York City in the year 2011 — a world in which religion, technology, and commerce have been unified in a great Trust of All of the Monotheist Religions. The headquarters of this cult/company is the Theological Palace, and Gener gives the reader a series of hilarious descriptions

of devices designed to extract money while making spirituality more convenient.

In the second part, we read of “the beautiful widow of Major of the Scottish Guard Sir Harry Mac-Crooll.” This young woman — still grieving after having lost her husband to a tiger attack in India — upon hearing that in the Theological Palace she can actually call her husband on the other side, flies immediately from London to New York in hopes of contacting the dead Major. After being led through the Palace, and being instructed on the use of the telephone, she is left to make the call.

In this short story, Gener demonstrates with cutting humor his razor-sharp criticism of both deified capitalism and monetized religion. In the Theological Palace money is spent for the sake of money — as in the case of the bottles of concentrated Lourdes water which will produce the miracle of generating a receipt for any bill submerged in them, or the water from Jordan that will induce conversion by lining the users' pockets with gold. Money is also spent for the purpose of convenience. Thus we have people buying compressed canned masses, or purchasing miracles, or prayers in the form of pills. With the story of the widow, Gener points directly at the vacuity of this monetized religion. There is no feeling, no *meaning* behind any of the Palace's contraptions. There is none of the sense of *community* either with fellow worshipers or with God that is so essential to religion. No, in the Theological



The Theological Palace

Palace worshipers are very much alone — except in the case of the telephone, which is why it is such an interesting addition. Here clients/worshipers are able to (for a price) communicate with their deceased loved ones. It is through the conversation between the widow and her husband that Gener delivers the great punchline of the story, but also his commentary on happiness and where it can (or cannot) be found.

For this translation of “The Theological Palace,” I have used both the original text from Gener’s *Pensant, sentint i rient* as well as the reedition in *Futurs imperfectes: Antologia de ciencia-ficció catalana* edited by Antoni Munné-Jordà. I have made a few small changes in syntax and lexicon for the sake of modern English readers. ●



Traducción de Todd Mack

Pompeu Gener
The Theological Palace

Anecdote of the Future

Riding in Wells' machine for exploring time, we have traveled to the year 2011, and embarking immediately on the airship *Nord-Express - Transatlantich*, we find ourselves in New York in one of the best hotels of that great city, which now numbers twenty two million inhabitants.

The world has changed beyond that. Everything is trusts, everything has been unified, even the churches and their respective cults.

Thanks to a very stylish Pope, the great trust of all of the monotheist religions has been made. Catholicism, Protestantism, the Greek schism, Mormonism, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and even more *isms*, have been forged into one single religion that reigns over all the earth, even over the land of *escudellas*;¹ because the question of *escudella* and religion, when closely examined, has many points of contact for the clergy.

All of the modern inventions have been applied to the cult, especially in New York, where they have just inaugurated the *Theological Palace*, which is a marvel. It has one hundred thirty floors, four smaller towers and a central tower. The building occupies an entire island.

On the bottom floor, there is a pile of spiritual inventions for the believers, such as machines for saying mass, which if you put in twenty dollars always extract the soul. They have the form of the latest model of cannon. An artillery clergyman points them right at Purgatory, and as the twenty dollars fall they shoot, always hitting the target, except when the spirit belongs to a black person.

There are electric mills for saying the Rosary. Suggestive Virgins and Saints that perform miracles for a fixed price. There is also a religious bar, served by well-dressed monks, where they sell bottles of intensified Lourdes water that works such wonders that it will even give you a receipt for any bill that is submerged in it. They also sell compressed masses in

cans, for those who are going on a journey. Extract of water from the Jordan that produces the efficient instantaneous conversion of the most unbelieving, aided by some good injections of gold into the vest, or by a good cataplasm of bank notes. One can also buy pills of a concentrated essence of select prayers, jaculatories in dosimetric globules, and attend a theater where they show movies about different heavens, natural prey, etc., etc.

But the most astounding is the *trans-world telephone*, which thanks to some new wave-lengths that have been discovered, puts the earth in communication with different heavens of each of the conglomerated religions.

The day after the opening of said Theological Palace, there came from London on a private luxury airplane, the young and beautiful widow of Major of the Scottish Guard Sir Harry's Mac-Crooll, who having been sent to India with a special commission from the English diplomacy, had been eaten for lunch by Bengal tiger one morning on which he had gone out for some fresh air.

It had not been a year since they were married; she was still in love with her defunct spouse, and upon learning that in the great Palace of the monotheist religions she could call her husband on the telephone, wherever he was, in the other world, she ordered a letter of recommendation from the Bishop of Canterbury, and as quickly as possible she made her way to New York, arriving there in just twenty-three minutes. She immediately went to the offices of the Theological Palace asking for the Director. A young clergyman, very elegant and attentive, came out to receive her, and as she showed him the letter he said:

"The director is very busy with a commission proceeding from Buddhism of the sect of the *Pispa-mitras*, but he has charged me with receiving you and showing you around the house. We already know why

1 Traditional Catalan dish.



The Theological Palace

you have come and who you are, because it has been more than a quarter of an hour since the Lord Bishop of Canterbury transmitted that information. Therefore, do me the favor of giving me your arm and I will accompany you to elevator 21, which is the one that will take us all the way to the top of the tower that crowns the Palace, room 125.” And giving her a *bombonière* filled with little mystic chocolates aromatized with the essence of Seraph, he offered her gallantly his arm, which the beautiful English widow accepted joyously.

Once they were in the elevator, barely had they sat on the sumptuous divan when the young clergyman touched the button and in one tenth of a second she found herself before an ample corridor, at the end of which there was a room with special devices that looked telephonic. The young clergyman indicated one of them, with a separate booth, to the widow, and he said to her:

“Place this on your ear” handing her an ivory trumpet “and speak very softly over that small drum, putting in first ten dollars, or two sterling pounds in the crack on the right. When the communication has been established you will hear a celestial music and when it stops you may begin to ask what you like. Of what communion was your deceased husband?”

“Reformed evangelical,” she replied.

Then the young clergyman pressed some buttons, turned a knob three times, a somewhat distant music began to be heard, a very soft music, and retiring to an honest distance, he told her:

“There it is! Now you can insert the two sterling pounds when you want.”

Just like that, the widow did it, the music stopped, and she began to call.

“I would like to be connected with Lord Mac-Crooll — Yes ... who died in India devoured by a tiger the 6th of September of last year at seven in the morning — Yes, ... I am his widow.”

The archangel who was on the call did not hesitate to answer:

“Here you have him. You can speak to him,” and suddenly the two spouses engaged in the following dialogue:

Widow: “Is it you, Harris my love?”

Lord: “Yes, my Nelly, it is I.”

Widow: “And how are you? How are things in that other world?”

Lord: “Very well, my girl, very well. Things could not be better.”

Widow: “Better than when you were with me and you always said you could never be happier, more joyful?”

Lord: “Of course, woman; much more. Much! Much, much more!”

Widow: “And what do you do? Do you eat well?”

Lord: “Much better than eating.”

Widow: “And you drink?”

Lord: “Much better than drinking?”

Widow: “And do you love?”

Lord: “Much more and much better than love.”

Widow: “Oh, oh! Tell me, tell me everything!”

Lord: “Oh! There are no word in English nor in French nor in any known language, that can express what we do here, nor our state ... It is so good, so ... so intense ... that ... well, I do not know how to tell you.”

Widow: “In other words you are happy?”

Lord: “Much more than happy, much more!”

Widow: “Then at least explain to me what Heaven is like.”

Lord: “But I am not in Heaven! ...”

Here the line went snap!, and the communication was interrupted, ending the dialogue to which two sterling pounds gave a right, leaving the young widow stupefied!

Fernando Pessoa

«Myth Supply Company, Ltd.»

Introduction and Translation
by Anna-Lisa Halling

Fernando António Nogueira Pessoa (1888-1935) was a gifted and prolific Portuguese writer who wrote in Portuguese, French, and English and whose well-deserved fame arrived posthumously. Today, Pessoa is one of the most important and well-known authors in Portuguese literary history. Although born in Lisbon, the author spent several years of his childhood in Durban, South Africa where he attended an English school. He returned to Portugal for a short visit at the age of thirteen only to stay indefinitely. He briefly attended the University of Lisbon, but eventually dropped out and began to write. During his lifetime, Pessoa published three books of poetry in English (*Antinous* and *Sonnets* in 1918 and *English Poems* in 1921) and one book of poetry in Portuguese (*Mensagem* in 1933). Besides writing and publishing under his own name, Pessoa also created over 70 heteronyms. Distinct from the alter egos created by his contemporaries, creations such as Alberto Caeiro, Ricardo Reis, and Álvaro de Campos each possessed their own life history, political leanings, religious beliefs, and even physical characteristics. Posthumously edited volumes include *Poesias de Fernando Pessoa* (1942), *Poesias de Álvaro de Campos* (1944), *Poemas de Alberto Caeiro* (1946), *Odes de Ricardo Reis* (1946), *Poesia, Alexander Search*

(1999), *Quadras* (2002), *Poesia, 1918-1930* (2005), and *Poesia, 1930-1935* (2006). Sadly, Pessoa died relatively young (he was just 47 years old) of cirrhosis of the liver.

Although much of Pessoa's work was published in the twentieth century, unpublished manuscripts have been found in the twenty-first century. Such was the case with Pessoa's "Myth Supply Company, Ltd." ("Empresa Fornecedora de Mitos, Lda."), published for the first time in 2012 by Ana Maria Freitas in a collection of short stories titled *O mendigo e outros contos*. In my translation, I have endeavored to keep as close to the 2012 edition while attempting to utilize language and syntax that does not alienate the reader. Additionally, although I have attempted to maintain the original punctuation, in some cases I have omitted or altered it for the sake of comprehension. This fragmentary text feels and reads as incomplete, as if waiting for the author to fill in the literal blank spaces on the pages. It is rough and unpolished and leaves much work for the reader. In her introduction to the anthology, Freitas even provides the reader with a key indicating symbols representative of words that are either missing or illegible in the original. While the gaping blank in the following story clearly indicates an accidental lacuna in the text, other portions are



Myth Supply Company, Ltd.

even more ambiguous; it is almost impossible to tell the difference between an ellipsis and a series of missing words, both indicated by the editor using the same punctuation. All in all, this short story, as well as my translation of it, reads like a work in progress, because it is. Notwithstanding this text's unfinished feel and temporal removal from today's readers, it rings true in a world of post-truth politics and fake news. Now, as then, the myth and its suppliers shape our beliefs, our society, and our selves. ●



Traducción de Anna-Lisa Halling

Fernando Pessoa
Myth Supply Company, Ltd.

“There he is,” said the maid, “the person who wants to talk to you.”

“He didn’t say who he was?” I asked.

“He gave me this card,” she said without a gesture.

I took the card, and what I read made me sit right down in my chair, against all the customs that I accumulated in my aimless life.

The card said this in bold letters:

MYTH SUPPLY COMPANY, LTD.

And, underneath, it read, in the usual place:

“Represented by . . .”

“This person asked for me?” I inquired of her.

“He asked for the ‘gentleman’ . . .”

“Okay,” I said, “tell him to enter . . .”

The card didn’t indicate an address, nor, beyond that, did it contain any other information.

The sales rep, or traveling salesman, entered my study with the physical confidence that is particular to his kind. He stood apart from known colleagues in that he carried neither a briefcase nor a smile. He greeted me ceremoniously, with a subtle nod of the head. I indicated that he should sit down. He sat down, and stared at me for a moment.

“You wanted? . . .” I half asked.

He leaned slightly towards me, and began to explain his mission in a voice that, while a little monotone, was not altogether unpleasing.

“Before explaining to you, with the proper details, the nature and quality of the products that I have to offer, a brief exposition of the reasons that led the business that I represent to — first, be founded, and second, produce, with the science and compunction that I will demonstrate, the qualities and kinds of products in which it specialized industrially.”

I nodded yes, vaguely, only perceiving for the time being, that so far I was not perceiving anything.

My visitor, who stared at the ground for a moment, soon lifted his head.

“Society is composed of three distinct tiers. The first is that of the creators of myths and is the true aristocracy. Befittingly, there are creators and transformers of myths—men of genius and men of talent, interpreting each word with a greater sense of value than that which is generally bestowed upon it. The second tier is that of the []. A soldier who fights for Napoleon feels in himself a vaster and grander life than the man who passes through life void and anonymous to himself.”

“But, in that case, why protest against the modern revolutionary and radical myths?”

“Because they claim to not be myths . . .”

“But every myth, in order to have power, must imbue itself with truth. There are no Christians where Christianity is thought to be a myth.”

“It’s not the same . . . the revolutionary myths tend to destroy the only reality, which is the distinction of classes. That’s where their social uselessness and falseness lies. It’s understandable that an aristocracy different from the current one would defend itself; but that no aristocracy at all is defended . . .”

“But an aristocracy of work can be defended, according to the radical myths themselves . . .”

“It doesn’t actually defend itself, but it’s possible that it may do so . . . Now work cannot be a myth, because it is a reality. Yes: to produce is to create reality, that is, entirely useless things. A myth is the creation of unrealities, that is, useful, living things that last and endure. Of all of the modern industries,” he said, “the only one that is now being carried out on a large scale, with everything still done in an empirical fashion, is the political industry. Now the natural path of invention — and our era is a markedly inventive era — is that of finding scientific formulas, and processes derived from those formulas, in order to eliminate empiricism, that brutish



Myth Supply Company, Ltd.

method, which is the first inevitable phase of any art or any industry. For what reason would someone have not yet remembered to introduce science and rational technique into political empiricism, destroying it and perfecting politics? For the simple reason that no one had yet remembered this. Until somebody remembers, no one will have remembered, not in the least. Now my company was the first to observe that the inventive field in the political industry was still open. My company invented the technical processes of this industry.”

And he disappeared, without a briefcase and still without a smile, from my very limited horizon.

Jean Richepin

«El monstruo»

Traducción de Álvaro Piñero González
y nota introductoria de Mariano Martín Rodríguez

Jean Richepin (1849-1926) es una figura importante de la literatura *decadente* francesa a caballo entre los siglos XIX y XX. Fue la poesía la que lo hizo ¿libro poeta?, especialmente a raíz de la condenación de su libro *La Chanson des gueux* [La canción de los mendigos] (1876/1881), que llevó a la justicia francesa a encarcelarlo durante un mes por escándalo público. Sin embargo, son sobre todo sus colecciones de relatos las que se han venido reeditando modernamente, gracias al interés por la narrativa breve finisecular, tanto en su vertiente histórica (por ejemplo, sus *Contes de la décadence romaine* [Cuentos de la decadencia romana], de 1898) como fantástica y especulativa, predominante en volúmenes de relatos como *Les Morts bizarres* [Las muertes extrañas] (1877), en la que destaca su cuento entre terrorífico y fictocientífico «La Machine à métaphysique» [La máquina de metafísica], y *Le Coin des fous* [El rincón de los locos] (1921), en la que la fantasía se tiñe a menudo de sarcasmo. Esta vertiente de humor negro, que subyace a toda su obra, predomina en la serie de opúsculos en forma dramática, de teatro para leer, que componen su libro *Théâtre chimérique* [Teatro quimérico] (1896), del que procede la obra traducida a continuación, «Le Monstre». En ella, Richepin adopta el modelo retórico del debate académico

para contraponer una serie de científicos del futuro y un varón que se presenta como una supervivencia o recurrencia atávica del tipo de varón del pasado, y que reacciona con extrañeza e indignación a las costumbres del lejano porvenir. La sociedad futura es, en efecto, muy diferente a la del siglo XIX (y a la actual), ya que la poesía es algo desconocido y, sobre todo, las necesidades fisiológicas, tanto las alimentarias como las sexuales, se satisfacen de manera científica, aunque peculiar. A este respecto, la escena que nos ofrece Richepin representa una de las primeras imaginaciones (anti)utópicas de una sociedad en la que la homosexualidad es la norma, ya que la reproducción es siempre artificial y la sexualidad, únicamente entre personas del mismo sexo. En este contexto, la existencia de Sanus (nombre evidentemente simbólico de la sanidad mental y de costumbres) es escandalosa. Para los académicos futuros, es un «monstruo». Esta inversión de la perspectiva, pues es la homosexualidad la que se consideraba entonces monstruosa y *contra natura*, invita al extrañamiento cognitivo suniniano, a preguntarnos si lo *natural* no es una construcción meramente *cultural*, con lo que Richepin sería aquí precursor de un planteamiento bastante postmoderno (por otra parte, uno se pregunta si hay algo en el postmodernismo que no se hubiera inventado antes, al menos en la fecunda y crítica cultura europea en torno a 1900). No obstante, el interés de la obra no es solo histórico. El autor no parece



El monstruo

afirmar de ningún modo las ventajas de la civilización imaginada con la contemporánea real representada por Sanus, cuya cordura parece someterse a ironía, pues su vulgaridad y cerrazón lo convierte en modelo más bien negativo, al tiempo que los académicos tampoco representan nada positivo, a causa de su pedantería y una cerrazón mental equivalente a la del propio Sanus. «El monstruo» es una sátira universal que escapa a un moralismo y discursivismo estrechos, además de a la homofobia y a cualquier planteamiento de supremacía de unos humanos sobre otros. Todos son objeto de un humor negro verdaderamente intemporal, cuya gracia inteligente sigue siendo eficaz hoy. ●



Traducción de Álvaro Piñero González

Jean Richepin
El monstruo

Sesión académica del siglo treinta y pico

PERSONAJES

EL PRESIDENTE DE LA ACADEMIA
EL DOCTOR SUTIL
SANUS
MIEMBROS DE LA ACADEMIA
UN MIEMBRO GRUÑÓN

EL PRESIDENTE.— Caballeros, la Academia Moderna de las Ciencias Fisiopsicosociobiológicas se halla hoy reunida para presenciar el examen de un curioso fenómeno y pronunciarse sobre la naturaleza del mismo, descubierto por nuestro insigne miembro correspondiente, el doctor Sutil, en uno de sus extraordinarios viajes, y que tiene el honor de someter a vuestro juicio. Cedo la palabra a nuestro eminente colega.

SUTIL.— Caballeros, prometo no emitir ninguna teoría preliminar en lo referente al caso teratológico que tendré el placer de presentarles. Considero que este caso solo es explicable con base en los vestigios más sedimentarios del atavismo más remotamente concebible. Pero me produciría reparo hacerles esta mera insinuación; prefiero confiar por completo en sus luces imparciales, limitándome a interrogar metódicamente al sujeto, cuyas respuestas les revelarán más que todos mis comentarios. De más está decir, caballeros, que tienen absoluta libertad para preguntarle ustedes mismos. Ruego me crean que lo que les digo no es charlatanería.

EL PRESIDENTE.— Mi querido colega, nadie aquí lo pone en duda.

EL GRUÑÓN (*aparte*).— Bueno, ya veremos.

SUTIL.— Caballeros, he aquí el sujeto. Si me lo permiten, comenzaré por resumir los datos facilitados por la oficina antropométrica. El sujeto tiene treinta años y mide un metro setenta y cinco centímetros.

EL GRUÑÓN.— ¿Exactos?

SUTIL.— Milímetro arriba o milímetro abajo.

EL GRUÑÓN.— Se tendría que haber medido con nonio.

EL PRESIDENTE.— Son detalles verdaderamente sin importancia.

EL GRUÑÓN.— Todo tiene importancia. Pero, en fin, ¡siga!

SUTIL.— Con más motivo si cabe, caballeros, procedo sin más al interrogatorio, cuya gravedad acallará, no tengo duda, toda malevolencia. Doy comienzo por la alimentación. (*A SANUS*) Diga a estos caballeros de qué se alimenta usted.

SANUS.— De pan, carne, huevos, lácteos, verdura, pescado, fruta.

SUTIL.— Ya lo han oído, caballeros.

EL PRESIDENTE.— Pues sí, lo hemos oído; pero creo expresar el sentir de toda la Academia si digo que ninguno ha entendido lo que ha oído.

MIEMBROS.— Cierto, cierto.

EL GRUÑÓN.— Yo sí lo he entendido; sin embargo, creo que se nos está tomando el pelo.

SUTIL.— Explíquese.

EL GRUÑÓN.— Quiero decir que esto no es más que un artificio, que se no está confundiendo con vocablos arcaicos. ¿Ingiere realmente el sujeto esos alimentos, en esas formas bárbaras, o acaso se trata únicamente de cómo designa su bolo alimenticio y en verdad lo asimila, como todo el mundo, en forma de lavativa y por el único orificio nutritivo hoy en uso, esto es, el ano? Este es el quid de la cuestión.

SUTIL.— Caballero, el sujeto come estas cosas por la boca y nada más que por la boca.

EL GRUÑÓN.— ¡Venga ya! Es imposible.

SUTIL (*a SANUS*).— ¿Por dónde come usted, por la boca o por el ano?

SANUS.— ¡Por la boca! ¡Habrás visto!

SUTIL.— Caballeros, no soy yo quien se lo hace decir.

EL GRUÑÓN (*aparte*).— Aquí hay gato encerrado.

SUTIL (*a SANUS*).— Muéstranos cómo lo hace usted.

SANUS.— ¡Oh, eso está chupado! (*Come*)



El monstruo

MIEMBROS.– ¡Impresionante! ¡Prodigioso!

EL GRUÑÓN (*aparte*).– ¡Es solo un truco de magia!

SUTIL.– Caballeros, el sujeto también bebe.

MIEMBROS.– ¿Qué? ¿Cómo?

SUTIL (*a SANUS*).– Diga lo que bebe usted.

SANUS.– Vino o agua cuando no tengo vino, pero me gusta más el vino.

MIEMBROS.– ¡Vino! ¡Agua! Pero, ¿qué dice?

EL GRUÑÓN (*de forma violenta*).– ¿Y por la boca también? ¿Sin inyecciones hipodérmicas?

SANUS.– ¡Hipodérmico lo será usted! ¿Por dónde iba a beber si no, idiota?

SUTIL.– Caballeros, les ruego tengan a bien disculpar al sujeto. Se pone irritable con frecuencia. Están ustedes en lo cierto, tales anomalías solo pueden ir ligadas a una turbación profunda de la condición mental. Si desean que el interrogatorio pueda continuar fructuosamente, permítanme tratarle con delicadeza, como corresponde hacerlo con un enfermo.

EL GRUÑÓN.– Como todo estaba preparado de antes...

SUTIL.– Aquí no hay nada preparado, mi querido colega, nada. Se lo juro. Interrogúele usted mismo si eso le inspira más seguridad; solamente, lo vuelvo a repetir, por favor, con delicadeza. Al fin y al cabo, caballeros, solo he logrado sacar respuestas del sujeto a base de tratarlo con extrema mansedumbre, hasta el punto de permitirle que me tratase de cretino y de loco.

EL GRUÑÓN (*aparte*).– ¡Y vaya si tiene razón!

SANUS.– Está claro, doctor, que es usted un bobo o un enajenado. Y me da a mí que todos estos señores no están mucho mejor que usted.

SUTIL.– Ya lo ven, caballeros. Pero los intereses de la ciencia siempre han de ir por delante, ¿no es cierto? ¡No dejemos que esto nos impida seguir nuestros estudios! (*a SANUS*) ¿Le importaría decirnos, querido amigo, cómo concibe usted las funciones genésicas?

SANUS.– ¿Disculpe?

SUTIL.– Dicho de otro modo, ¿tendría usted la gentileza de explicar a estos señores que para usted es natural la cópula con una persona del sexo opuesto?

SANUS.– ¿Eh? ¿Qué?

EL GRUÑÓN (*irónico*).– Quiero suponer que nuestro eminente colega no pretende hacernos creer que su sujeto lleva a cabo la unión sexual a la manera de las bestias.

SUTIL.– Tal es mi pretensión.

MIEMBROS.– ¡Ah, eso es un poco fuerte!

EL PRESIDENTE.– Ruego a nuestro honorable colega tenga a bien disculparme, pero considero que reflejo el sentir de la Academia entera al afirmar que a esto no se le puede dar crédito alguno. Nuestro honorable colega sabe de sobra que la fecundación artificial es la única natural hoy día y desde tiempos inmemoriales. Al igual que sabe que, como mandan las costumbres definitivas, los placeres llamados sensuales solo se admiten entre individuos del mismo sexo. Las leyes de la sociedad moderna no consagran o toleran ningún otro.

SUTIL.– No ignoro ninguno de estos pormenores, mi querido e ilustre presidente...

EL GRUÑÓN.– ¿Y aun así insiste usted en que su sujeto llega a aberrar hasta el punto de...?

SUTIL.– ¿Acaso me habría atrevido a molestarles, mis eminentes colegas, prometiéndoles el estudio de un caso completamente excepcional de no ser así? No, en absoluto. Me ha parecido mi obligación recabar su atención sobre este fenómeno porque es innegable que se trata de un fenómeno absolutamente anormal.

EL GRUÑÓN.– ¿Y practica esta teoría extraordinaria de la bisexualidad?

SUTIL.– Así lo afirma.

EL GRUÑÓN.– ¿Puede preguntarle de qué forma lo hace?

SUTIL (*a SANUS*).– ¿Le ha oído? Respóndale, por favor.

SANUS.– ¡Vaya panda de viejos chochos!



El monstruo

SUTIL.– ¡No se enfurezca, amigo mío! Venga, venga, cálmese y tenga la amabilidad de respondernos. Todos somos hombres de ciencia. Buscamos la verdad. Queremos instruirnos. Trabajamos en pos del progreso. ¿Qué le cuesta explicarnos...?

SANUS.– ¿Explicar qué? ¿Cómo hacemos el amor?

SUTIL.– Cómo lo hacen, sí, amigo mío, la forma en que lo hacen, que nos parece extraña.

SANUS.– ¡¿Cómo que extraña?! ¡Pero si es la única natural, la de todos los animales!

SUTIL.– Ya lo ven, caballeros. No soy yo quien se lo hace decir.

MIEMBROS.– ¡Oh! ¡Vaya! ¡Milagroso! ¡Asombroso! ¡Pasmoso!

EL GRUÑÓN.– ¡Una última pregunta! El sujeto no escribirá, por casualidad, versos, ¿verdad?

MIEMBROS.– ¡Ah! ¿Pero qué dice? ¿Versos? ¿Qué es eso?

SUTIL.– Así es, caballeros, el sujeto escribe versos.

EL GRUÑÓN.– ¿Y con qué, si se puede saber, los escribe?

SUTIL (*a SANUS*).– Eso, ¿con qué los escribe usted, amigo mío?

SANUS.– Pues, con ideas, sentimientos, sensaciones, palabras, imágenes, rimas e ingenio.

MIEMBROS.– ¡Jajaja! ¡Esto es ridículo! ¡Jajaja! ¡Con imágenes! ¡Con palabras! ¡Con rimas! ¡Con ingenio! ¡Jajaja!

EL PRESIDENTE.– Caballeros, me parece que esta legítima hilaridad general resuelve la cuestión. Nuestro eminente colega quiso consultarnos acerca de la naturaleza del sujeto que nos ha presentado. Creo que hablo por la Academia entera al decir que nuestra convicción se halla ahora debidamente aclarada y que no cabe más que una sola opinión en lo que se refiere al sujeto, y esta es unánime. Este producto singular del atavismo es...

EL GRUÑÓN.– Pido que se me reconozca el honor de haber sido el primero en descubrir que es un...

MIEMBROS.– ¡Un monstruo! ¡Un monstruo! Es un monstruo.

SUTIL.– Caballeros, no soy yo quien se lo hace decir.

Pietro Gori

«La leyenda del Primero de Mayo»

Nota introductoria y traducción
de Mariano Martín Rodríguez

Pietro Gori (1865-1911) era un conocido activista anarquista y antimilitarista italiano, autor de canciones propagandísticas muy populares y, sobre todo, uno de los grandes creadores del mito del Primero de Mayo. Además de poemas y alguna obra dramática dedicados a esta fecha central del imaginario del movimiento obrero, destacó por su popularidad una anticipación de la revolución libertaria futura en esa misma fecha. «La leggenda del Primo Maggio» fue varias veces reeditada en vida del autor y después de su muerte. Fechada durante su exilio en Buenos Aires en 1900, se publicó en forma de folleto en 1905, pero también apareció, a veces con cambios en el texto, en la prensa anarquista italiana en varias ocasiones. En volumen, se recogió por primera vez en la tercera de sus obras, titulada *Cenere e faville*. Este es el texto traducido a continuación, a través de su reedición moderna en el libro de Maurizio Antonioli *Pietro Gori, il cavaliere errante dell'anarchia: studio e testi* (Pisa, BFS, 1995, pp. 116-119).

«La leggenda del Primo Maggio» se presenta como un documento del futuro («pro-postero», como reza el neologismo casi intraducible del subtítulo original). Tras una breve introducción retórica muy enfática y ornada, se reproduce la conferencia-homenaje de un historiador del porvenir que explica

las difíciles condiciones de vida de los obreros de finales del siglo XIX, la falta de equidad humana del sistema económico imperante (sobre todo, la existencia de una clase rentista ociosa) y el surgimiento de un grupo creciente de obreros reivindicadores de un cambio social radical, basado en la solidaridad de clase, y su resultado, que había de ser el reparto de la riqueza y la supresión de naciones y fronteras.

Como es natural tratándose de una lección histórica ante un público futuro al corriente de su mundo, no se describe esta sociedad del porvenir directamente, sino que sus características principales, la igualdad y el universalismo, se desprenden del contraste, más o menos expreso, con el pasado económico y políticamente violento que se evoca, ante cuyas injusticias se produce la reacción de las manifestaciones del Primero de Mayo, en su calidad de jornada revolucionaria repetida cada año, hasta llegar aquel en el que el viejo sistema se habría derrumbado, ya en los primeros años del siglo XX. El historiador no da detalles de la manera en que se habría producido la revolución, aunque se puede pensar que esta se había debido a una concienciación universal de los trabajadores, que habrían tomado su destino en sus manos, al modo anarquista, más que a la acción de una minoría revolucionaria según el futuro modelo soviético. Esta vaguedad es lo que pudo favorecer la popularidad de la «leyenda» a lo largo del tiempo, ya que no estaba ligada a unas circunstancias concretas, a diferencia de otras



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anticipaciones anarquistas (por ejemplo, *Comment nous ferons la révolution* [1909], de los anarcosindicalistas franceses Émile Pouget y Émile Pataud).

Además, si bien su estilo grandilocuente, con largas frases y enorme cantidad de figuras retóricas, puede parecer excesivo, no hay que olvidar que el público de entonces apreciaba este lenguaje florido, que apelaba a la emoción más que al intelecto. No se trataba de persuadir con razonamientos, sino de atraer al movimiento obrero libertario a las masas mediante la explotación de sentimientos viscerales. Asimismo, la circunstancia hipotética de la conferencia del historiador justifica plenamente la escritura recargada, aunque eficaz, pues en ella no se trata de explicar ni narrar el pasado, sino de loar el heroísmo de los antiguos revolucionarios obreros, a la manera en que los discursos de entonces solían elogiar la labor histórica de las personas objeto de homenaje, costumbre que, por supuesto, no ha desaparecido del todo.

La leyenda del primero de mayo profetizada por Gori es un texto que funde la retórica de la historiografía con la de la oratoria, por medio de un tono épico-lírico, himnico incluso, que parece perfectamente adaptado a la índole de su contenido y de su género discursivo. De hecho, se trata sobre todo de una interesante muestra de oratoria de anticipación implícita que añade al atractivo histórico de su forma el de enmarcarse en una producción utópica y especulativa anarquista poco recordada. Esta, sin haber conseguido demasiados aciertos literarios comparables al de Gori, ilustra al menos la importancia de la ficción de anticipación en este importante movimiento social, decididamente orientado hacia el porvenir, hacia un futuro que ha resultado ser muy distinto del imaginado entonces por sus activistas. ●



Traducción de Mariano Martín Rodríguez

Pietro Gori
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Cuando la época de vergüenza y sangre que agoniza con el penúltimo siglo del segundo milenio esté bien muerta —y desde la última podredumbre se abran, eterno poema de la vida, las flores de nuevas primaveras, con la mies madurando para toda la familia humana, ahora ya hermanada de verdad; cuando los gigantes de hierro, arrastrados a lo largo de los continentes y de los océanos, rayos por su forma y su velocidad, transporten de un extremo a otro del mundo los productos del hombre al hermano distante —y las canciones de guerra y las epopeyas del pasado se hayan apagado, como meteoros nocturnos, en la aurora de los cánticos nuevos, llameantes sobre la novísima transfiguración de la especie humana; cuando las lenguas suaves de Dante, de Víctor Hugo, de Cervantes, se hayan fundido en una soberbia armonía ideal con las lenguas austeras de Shakespeare, de Goethe, de Dostoyevsky —y la libertad, besada por el arte, haya refinado los corazones para el culto del amor, de la belleza, de la justicia, última religión superviviente entre los hijos del hombre, entonces el historiador, porque en ese tiempo de verdad habrá verdaderamente historia, dirá a sus contemporáneos el símbolo del Primero de Mayo, convertido en leyenda y día sagrado para los redimidos:

«En una época ya lejana, había sobre la Tierra cosas monstruosas, que costaría creer al hombre civilizado de la nación humana si no existieran los mudos testimonios de tanta infamia, que duró una noche, larga de siglos.

»Lo que ahora parece natural, el disfrute común de los bienes ofrecidos a los hombres por la naturaleza, o por la labor de las generaciones, acumulados y transmitidos a las generaciones futuras, como legado familiar a todos y cada uno, era tachado de utopía, cuando no era condenado como delito.

»Nació y moría, entonces, la humanidad con un destino inicuo.

»Una parte de ella, que se llamaba la clase de los ricos, de los poderosos, había acaparado, usurpándolo

mediante el fraude o la violencia, todo el patrimonio social, todo el tesoro del genio, del estudio, del trabajo —el enorme depósito de riqueza que no un hombre sino todos los hombres, no una generación sino todas las generaciones habían acrecentado con su sudor, sus lágrimas, su sangre.

»La guerra del hombre contra la naturaleza, reacia a concederle sus tesoros, sus secretos, había sido combatida en común, a lo largo de milenios de preparación fatigosa; sin embargo, algunos tiranos o estafadores se habían apoderado del producto social de los siglos, en nombre del privilegio que llamaron derecho de propiedad.

»Y por medio de este, los tiranos y los defraudadores, convertidos en manipuladores de las leyes, se habían constituido en una casta ociosa, que transmitía el ocio junto con la riqueza de padres a hijos; pretendiendo sostener, pese a la inactividad de los padres, los hijos y los nietos, que esta riqueza era fruto del trabajo propio.

»Por otra parte, abajo, las multitudes obreras de todos los países, entonces divididos por la ambición de los poderosos, vivían en una condición extraña, incomprendible para el ciudadano de la nación humana.

»Los trabajadores, que producían en consecuencia toda la riqueza, se transmitían de padres a hijos la fatiga, una fatiga de pollinos —y con la fatiga, la miseria.

»Las crónicas de la época dicen que había albañiles que, tras haber construido tantas casas para quienes no sabían construirlas, se quedaban sin un techo para la vejez, cansada por tanto desgaste; que había tejedores y tejedoras que, tras haber confeccionado kilómetros y kilómetros de tejidos, telas y encajes para quien no sabía manejar la lanzadera, pasaban largos inviernos sin ropa para cubrirse ellos mismos, sus niños y sus viejos; que había campesinos que, tras quedar minados por años y años de cultivar los campos y hacer crecer, para quien no sabía arar, torrentes de trigo y otros productos agrícolas, quedaban privados de una



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parte siquiera mínima del pan que los improductivos echaban con desprecio a los perros.

«Y lo más absurdo radicaba en el hecho de que la clase de trabajadores que se había afanado por producir más —tras haber llenado los almacenes de otros con su producto, que el capricho del mercado había dejado de desear— era arrojada bruscamente a la calle, casi castigada con el hambre, por haber trabajado demasiado. Y se llamaban, estos fenómenos de la imprevisión y la necesidad de aquellos sistemas, crisis de producción, mientras que el mercado era una forma de latrocinio legal de despojo mutuo, en el que la suerte de las naciones y de las necesidades públicas se reducía a un siniestro juego de azar.

»Así iban las cosas, con pocos cambios de forma, desde tiempo inmemorial, cuando brotaron, de las vísceras mismas de esta sociedad putrefacta, los gérmenes de la resurrección.

»Y es aquí donde la historia, tras el poema de los poetas precursores, adopta los contornos fantásticos de la leyenda.

»Un día, del sepulcro de cinco mártires que una sociedad de mercaderes había hecho ahorcar en una metrópolis de América, porque habían predicado los derechos de los trabajadores y una jornada de fatiga menos larga y bestial para ellos y sus compañeros, partieron en peregrinación a un congreso de obreros, que se celebraba en una metrópolis europea, muchos hombres de buena voluntad, que se llamaban los *caballeros del trabajo*, como legión de combatientes contra los *caballeros del ocio*.

»Y allí, al congreso mundial, llevaron ellos esta idea, simple y grande —como todas las cosas que manan del corazón del pueblo— de que el día primero de mayo (el mes de los ocios dulces para el vagabundeo elegante y feliz) debía ser reivindicado, por la voluntad de las plebes, para el descanso de las plebes mismas. Que, ese día, los trabajadores del mundo arrojasen a un rincón las herramientas de su oficio, cruzándose de

brazos, frente a los ignaros de toda hora, para ver si el mundo se movía por obra de quienes producían, muriendo de miseria, o gracias a quienes quedaban ociosos, pese a nadar en lo superfluo.

»Que en la tarde de los mayos, los hijos de las diversas naciones, mirando al sol, entendieran que este empieza a brillar sobre un espectáculo nuevo: la unificación de la patria universal del hombre, en nombre del trabajo.

»Y la fecha memorable comenzó a transcurrir desde el primer año de la última década del siglo XIX.

»En la mañana del día fatídico (sea historia o leyenda, realidad en cualquier caso) las gentes humanas, cuyo único blasón eran las manos encallecidas y los vientres semivacíos, se despertaron, como ante las fanfarrias de un himno misterioso, nunca antes oído por los vivientes.

»Ese himno venía de lejos, de todos los rincones más apartados del mundo, y pasaba entre las máquinas paradas, por las obras taciturnas, por las ciudades atónitas, como un frémito de voces infinitas, de voces diversas, en idiomas variados —un resonar de esperanzas, dolores, ideales; una cosa con el sabor de la riqueza de un alba y del acercarse de una tempestad.

»Los otros, los parásitos, a fuerza de fraude y de violencia, hacían como que sonreían, mofándose, pero la sonrisa se mudó en fea mueca y acabó contrayéndose, por el miedo, en un temblor de terror.

»Y a cada nuevo pretexto, a cada alzamiento de la voz obrera, gritando los derechos del estómago malnutrido, las clases que vivían ociosas ordenaban a hombres adiestrados en el arte de matar a otros hombres, llamados soldados, que pegaran tiros a los hermanos, los padres, las esposas.

»Y lo que parece completamente imposible en los tiempos actuales es que estos hombres obedecían ciega, cruelmente a los jefes, y ejecutaban el fratricidio.

»Así perpetuaban este hecho inconcebible, que el pueblo trabajador, que se consumía para beneficio de



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aquellos ociosos, llamados entonces patrones, fabricaba él mismo sus cadenas, así como los fusiles y los cañones que debían servir para exterminarlo, a manos de sus hijos, a manos de gentes del pueblo, esclavos y pisoteados ellos también.

»Pero los hábitos vivificantes de las primeras albas de mayo, las albas del gran himno misterioso de resurrección pasaban de un año a otro, fortificando las conciencias en los pechos obreros.

»Y las voces, que se transmitían la contraseña de frontera a frontera, se hacían cada vez más numerosas, hasta que, al acabar el siglo, se habían vuelto fragor de huracán.

»Fue entonces, en la primera mañana de mayo de uno de los primeros años del siglo xx, cuando se produjo el milagro: la transfiguración maravillosa de los hombres y de las cosas, y fue entonces también cuando la historia irradió fulgores de leyenda.

»La iniquidad, las estafas, las violencias triunfales y celebradas, si las cometían los de arriba, habían colmado el vaso de las amarguras y de la vergüenza, el vaso ofrecido durante siglos a las muchedumbres trabajadoras como compensación de los sacrificios inenarrables de los que había brotado la civilización.

»El alma popular estaba preñada de dolor e idealismo.

»Cuando salió el primer sol de Mayo, millones de voces tronaron al unísono el himno de la liberación, porque los esclavos se habían contado y solo entonces se habían dado cuenta de ser el número, la fuerza, el derecho, la humanidad; los otros, los dominadores solo eran un puñado de gandules, temblorosos de miedo.

»Aquel día de luz tuvo su comienzo la epopeya pura del género humano, fue la fecha histórica de la nueva era, el milagro de todas las naciones obreras, que entendían, que hablaban la misma lengua, con acentos diferentes: el idioma del trabajo creador, reivindicativo; este milagro de gloria de la redención de los hombres, en la vida, por la vida».

De este modo expondrá el historiador del futuro, cuando exista verdaderamente la historia, la leyenda del Primero de Mayo.