

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story collections during his lifetime, and at the time of his untimely death, he left behind a considerable amount of unpublished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).

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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

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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 Basilica

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.



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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.



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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 *Grémio*,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.



The Catastrophe

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.