

A Man Without a Name: *O Banqueiro Anarchista* and the Impossibility of Language

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Keywords

Fernando Pessoa, Anarchist Banker, Oxymoron, Paradox, Gallicized Structures

Abstract

Duality is a cross-wise theme found throughout *O Banqueiro Anarchista*, story written by Fernando Pessoa in 1922. This article aims at revisiting what previous scholars have analyzed about the narration's paradox and oxymoron while proposing that not only is the topic of anarchism and finance the main expression of duality, but also the characters themselves, the plot, the setting, and, above all, the linguistic structures used throughout the story. The article will analyze how the protagonist, with his rhetoric and his manipulation of logic, stands as a humanized metaphor of language and linguistic phenomena, simultaneously destroying and building a new lexical universe.

Palavras-chave

Fernando Pessoa, Banqueiro Anarchista, Oximoro, Paradoxo, Estrutura Galicizada

Resumo

A dualidade é uma temática transversal achada em *O Banqueiro Anarquista*, história escrita por Fernando Pessoa em 1922. Este artigo tem por objetivo revisar o que os estudiosos anteriores analisaram sobre o paradoxo e a contradição da narração para propor que não só é o tema do anarquismo e as finanças a expressão principal da dualidade, mas, também os personagens, o argumento, o cenário, e, sobretudo, as estruturas linguísticas utilizadas ao longo da história. O artigo irá analisar a forma como o protagonista, com sua retórica e sua manipulação da lógica, se destaca como uma metáfora humanizada da linguagem e dos fenômenos lingüísticos, simultaneamente destruindo e construindo um novo universo lexical.

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Two men – both nameless – have just finished eating. While they give way to digestion they also start up a conversation. One insists – unsuccessfully – in contravening the other. That one strives – with success – to refute his friend. One seems to overwhelm the other, and while the first man appears clever, the second man seems to be the opposite. Among every defended and contradictory word, only one obtains the ultimate victory: he who proves how he manages to be one man and two men at a time.

This is, in broad terms, the storyline of *O Banqueiro Anarchista*¹, a story written by Fernando Pessoa in 1922 within the oronym work and one of the few texts that he published during his lifetime. The story was included in the inaugural issue of *Contemporanea*, a literary magazine that was born in Lisboa under the modernist movement with the slogan “feita expressamente para gente civilizada e para civilizar gente” [“made specifically for civilized people and to civilize people”]², a tone that anticipated the arrogance and irony of the banker, who, along with the magazine, was coming to life. Pessoa continued to work on this text after its publication, and evidence of this is shown in the rewrites he did of certain fragments (Fig. 1), of additional texts that tried to give continuity to the story, and of the unfinished translation into English that he began just before he died (Fig. 2). The fact that 13 years after its publication Pessoa continued rethinking the text means that, as Ellen Sapega points out, we are dealing with an unfinished story (1989: 114).

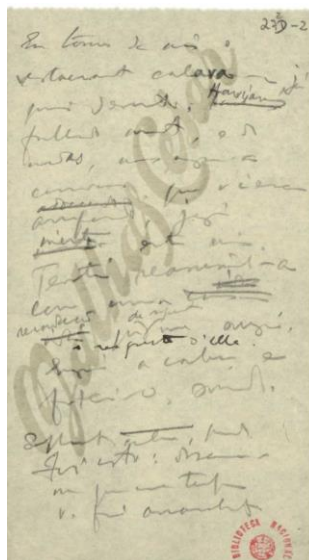


Fig. 1. BNP/E3, 27²D-2^r.

Rewritten fragment from the beginning of the story.

¹ Titles and quotes of *O Banqueiro Anarchista* have been left as originally written, in their old Portuguese spelling.

² Unless otherwise indicated translations are my own.

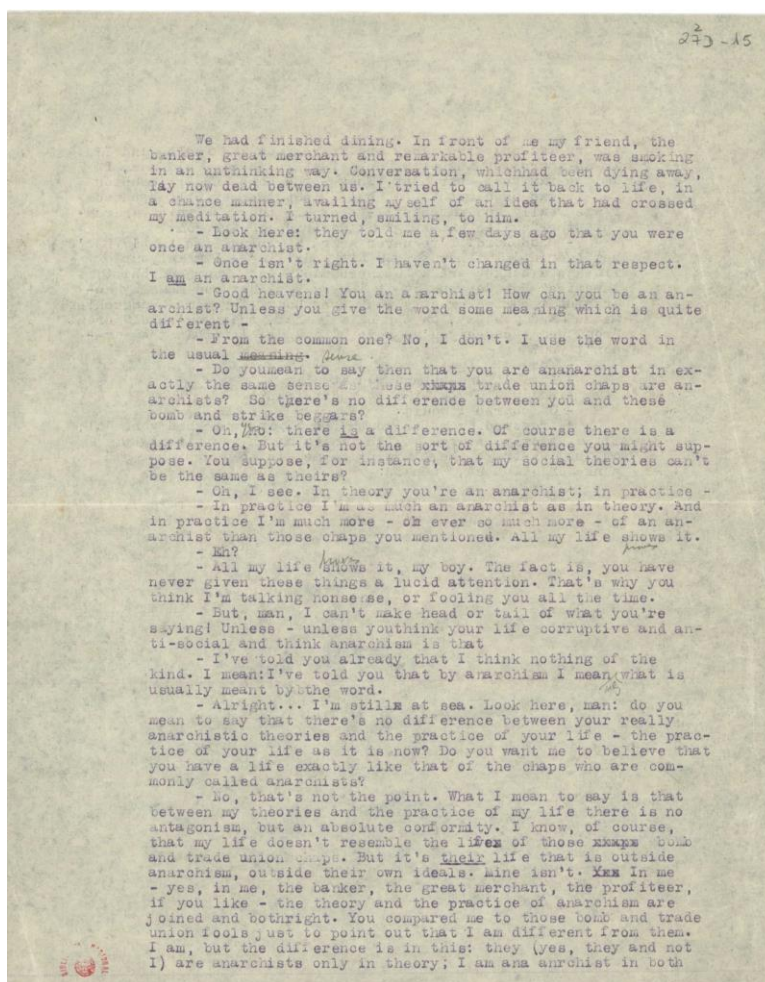


Fig. 2. BNP/E3, 27D-15.

Pessoa's English translation of the story's first pages.

In *O Banqueiro Anarchista*, Pessoa reinterprets and ironically approaches the libertarian doctrine that saw its rise in the 19th century, and critically examines the logic of the socialist and communist systems that had recently begun to be implemented towards the year of its writing. Pessoa's library has allowed us to know that he read the works of some of the main men who inspired the libertarian doctrine, whose theories lie beneath the banker's discourse: the 18th century forefather of anarchism, William Godwin, who theorized about how the progress of the human race was linked to the elimination of corrupt systems and, ultimately, to anti-statism; Russian activist Mikhail Bakunin, famous for his theory of collective anarchism that proposed the collectivization of means of production and the installation of a communal loyalty that would abolish the need for money; the American abolitionist Henry David Thoreau, whose work *Civil Disobedience* has had ambiguous interpretations, as on one hand he defends the immediate passing from one government system to a better one, but on the other, he hopes for an ideal government that does not govern over anyone; and lastly, possibly the most immediate influence, English sociologist Herbert Spencer, who defended the

idea of social Darwinism and condemned all types of social interference in the laws of nature and individual freedom, while remaining skeptical towards the sustainability of systems such as socialism; and who pondered, in his work *The Man Versus the State* (1884), if men's social evolution would result, if not in anarchism, at least in a reduced form of a state with minimum functions (Fig. 3). On the other hand, as David Jackson and Burghard Baltrusch point out in their respective analysis of *O Banqueiro Anarquista*, the story also parts from a deconstruction of Rousseau's "state of nature" that parodies the idea of a social contract arguing that individualism is the only exit facing selfishness and natural inequalities of human beings.³

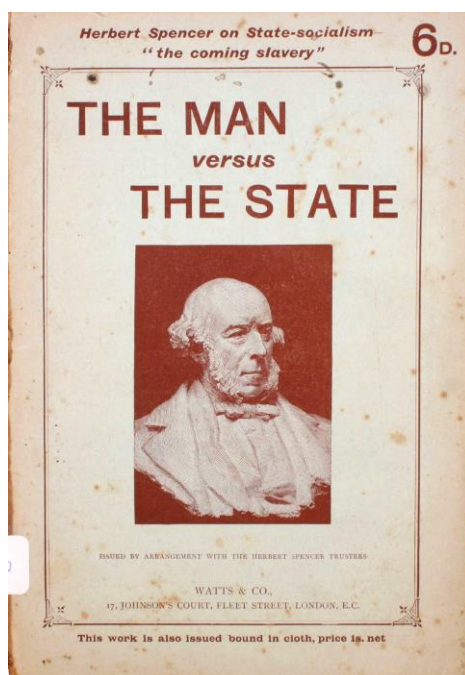


Fig. 3. Casa Fernando Pessoa, 1-144.

Pessoa's copy of *The Man versus the State*. The anarchist banker echoes Herbert Spencer's label on socialism – "the coming slavery" –, by calling his so-called anarchist partners a gang born to be "escravos" ["slaves"] (Pessoa, 2013: 64).

The publication date of this undeniably political story is meaningful considering that it took place only five years after the Russian Revolution and four years after the end of World War I. It is also relevant since it is precisely around 1922 when Álvaro de Campos begins to establish himself as a solid prose writer, and *O Banqueiro Anarquista*, with a content of porous borders between heteronym

³ Out of these authors, the following books can be found in Fernando Pessoa's personal library: William Godwin's *Lives of the Necromancers or an Account of the Most Eminent Persons Who Have Claimed for Themselves or to Whom Has Been Imputed by Others the Exercise of Magical Power*; and Herbert Spencer's *Social Statics Abridged and Revised*, *The Man Versus the State*, and *Seven Essays Selected from the Works of Herbert Spencer*. See Pizarro, Ferrari, and Cardillo (2012) and <http://casafernandopessoa.cm-lisboa.pt/bdigital/index/index.htm>

and oronym authorship, constitutes an anticipation. As Baltrusch states, there are indications that Pessoa's readings on anarchism influenced Campos' aesthetics, especially in their polemicist quality and in the idea of the superiority of the individual (2010: 43). This is seen in the poem "Sim, sou eu, eu mesmo, tal qual resultei de tudo" (Pessoa, 1990: 230-232), for example, where Campos proclaims: "Sou eu mesmo" ["I am myself"]; or in the self-interview that the heteronym wrote in 1925 (fig. 4), whose form and content are an extension of *O Banqueiro*. In it, Campos criticizes – with tantamount sarcasm and irony – the political situation in England and Portugal, Russian Bolshevism (which he brands as a "mytho" ["myth"]) and labor unions (whom he calls "idiotas" ["idiots"]) and "instrumentos inconscientes" ["unconscious tools"], and regrets that Europe remains anchored to "velhas ficções políticas, reliquias de uma empocha extinta" ["old political fictions, relics of an extinct time"] (Pessoa, 2013: 127-130), words that belong to the banker's unmistakable language.

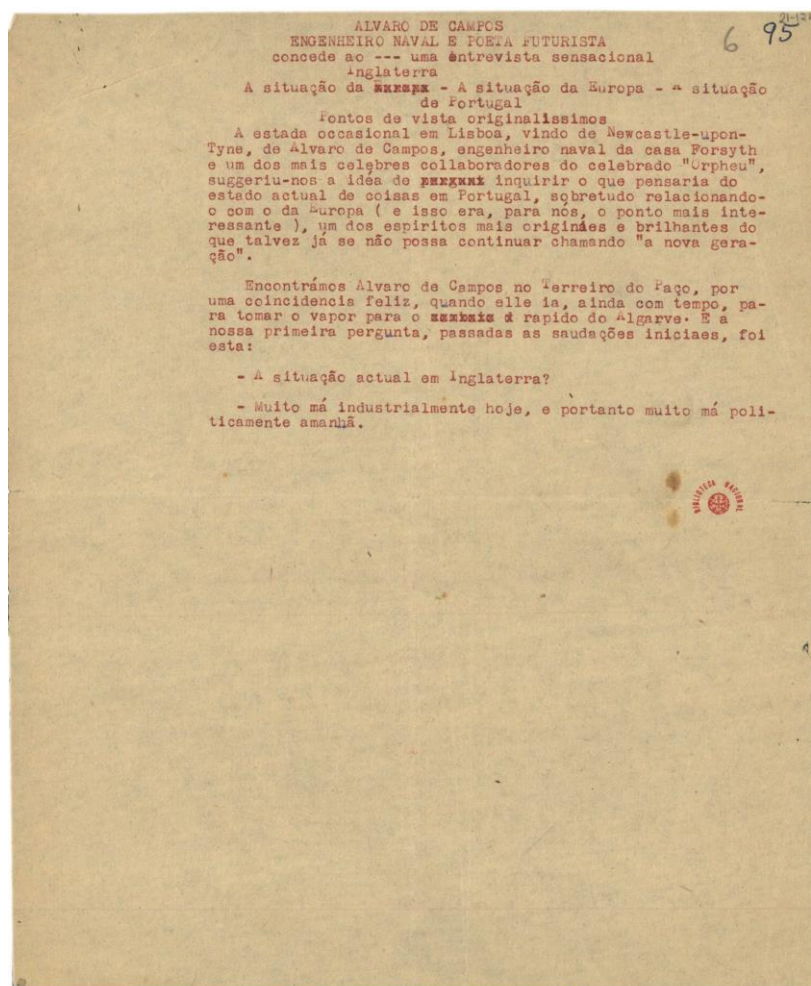


Fig. 4. BNP/E3, 21-124.
First page of Álvaro de Campos' self-interview.

Thus begins *O Banqueiro Anarchista*:

Tinhamos acabado de jantar. Defronte de mim o meu amigo, o banqueiro, grande commerciante e açambarcador notavel, fumava como quem não pensa. A conversa, que fôra amortecendo, jazia morta entre nós. Procurei reanimal-a, ao acaso, servindo-me de uma idéa que me passou pela meditação. Voltei-me para elle, sorrindo.

—É verdade: disseram-me ha dias que v. em tempos foi anarchista...

—Fui, não: fui e sou. Não mudei a esse respeito. *Sou* anarchista.

(Pessoa, 2013: 52)

[We had finished dining. In front of me my friend, the banker, great merchant and remarkable profiteer, was smoking in an unthinking way. Conversation, which had been dying away, lay now dead between us. I tried to call it back to life, in a chance manner, availing myself of an idea that had crossed my meditation. I turned, smiling, to him.

—Look here: they told me a few days ago that you were once an anarchist.

—Once isn't right. I haven't changed in that respect. I *am* an anarchist.]

(Pessoa, 2013: 150).

The conversation – and therefore, the story – are born by chance. The question – inoffensive or not – leads to a triumphant response. And the successful response provokes more questions that, in turn, will contribute to a spiral game of cunning answers and questions. The storyline is constituted as a dialogue of words that come and go with the explicit intention of defeating each other. Hence, the story is the result of intentional and aforethought words, and while the indefensible is defended and the logically illogical reveals its nature, the malleability of words and the elastic yet dangerous possibilities of language are questioned.

The rules of this game are established from the beginning: one man insists on proving to the other one that, *logically*, he is a banker and at the same time an anarchist; and his friend, who from now on will be referred to as the interlocutor, will be in charge of refuting him. Even when he agrees with the banker, he intends to serve as a devil's advocate. Nevertheless, the disparity is evident, and the only one who seems to fire exultant arguments is the banker. One by one, the interlocutor's rebuttals are easily destroyed, and the banker progresses in his argument with a skillfully calculated rhetoric. However, given how easy it is to squash the one who is determined to disprove him, the banker's effort while arguing also seems simulated. In turn, the counter-arguments of the interlocutor hide beneath a dual nature: on one hand they serve as obstacles and, on the other, as steps that progressively bring the banker closer to the peak of his rhetoric victory. That is, the banker takes advantage of the apparently vigorous but essentially weak arguments of his opponent and leads him into a dead end, which he later employs for his own benefit to come out triumphant. Therefore, the interlocutor is not an adversary, but someone who *plays the role* of an adversary. He is a disciple disguised as a rival – as an accomplice – who stands beneath his friend, who lifelessly accepts his defeat, and whose arguments are merged with those of the banker fulfilling nothing more than the role of an echo. In the meantime, both characters argue with dissonances despite actually singing in

unison, and while the supremacy of one entirely absorbs the other, both become the oxymoron of an uneven par.

What promises *to be* a dialogue in reality only *seems to be* one – the essence contravenes the appearance – and, in the game of being versus seeming, the conversation reveals its contradictory nature: the dialogue between two people – i.e. duologue – is at the same time a monologue, and the supposed bipolar conversation actually revolves around one single pole. Meanwhile, the one who dominates the art of monopoly as a profession ends up applying it into the conversation. This paradoxical singleness of duality turns out to be extremely significant, since it holds the central point of the story and the objective of the banker: the proof that banking is inherent to – and perhaps the same as – anarchy, and vice versa. As Sapega affirms, multiplicity is not only one of Pessoa's greater legacies, but paradoxically it is the element that unites the multiple perspectives in his work (1989: 111). Just like the classic algebraic fallacy⁴ that establishes an equivalence between 1 and 2, whose trick is revealed by proving that it is based on an impossible division by zero, the main question regarding this text is if the synonymy argued between banking and anarchism is equally deceitful: if it is sustained on an impossible annulment of meaning in the variables.

It is worth going back to the previous mention about chance. The interlocutor, the one who introduces the topic of anarchism, clarifies beforehand that it is a random occurrence. However, the contrast between the apparently unexpected topic and the clever foresight that the banker demonstrates in his responses stands out. The reader faces a person who delivers a calculated speech, with words that do not seem to be conceived on the fly but rather prefabricated. In this way, the banker – just like his interlocutor – also executes something different than what it is assumed he will do (in this case, argue by chance), and more than a banker who defends himself as a result of an unexpected attack, he seems to be a man *playing the role* of a banker, an actor whose words are brought from the past, from a previously planned and studied script that ought to be articulated to perfection in a simulated present. Thus the passing of the story ceases to exist as an unrepeatable moment in

⁴ In algebra, there is a classic fallacy that proves the equivalence between 1 and 2, which can ultimately be modified to prove a supposed equivalence between any two numbers.

$$a = b$$

$$a^2 = a \cdot b$$

$$a^2 - b^2 = a \cdot b - b^2$$

$$(a + b)(a - b) = b(a - b)$$

$$a + b = b$$

$$b + b = b$$

$$2 \cdot b = b$$

$$2 \cdot b / b = b / b$$

$$2 = 1$$

The mistake, which can easily go unnoticed, lies in lines 4 and 5: $(a + b)(a - b)$ is divided by $(a - b)$ and becomes $(a + b)$, which is invalid because $(a - b) = 0$, and division by zero is undefined.

the banker's present and, instead, becomes a scene that could belong to fiction, with the possibility of being portrayed at any time and more than once. Since it represents a timeframe that resembles the staging of a previously rehearsed theatrical piece, the present of this story is, in fact, a substitute of the present.

The authenticity of the atmosphere in which both men converse is uncertain, and the limits between what is real or fictitious vanish and give way to theatrics. The story is divided into seven fragments that correspond to each of the seven main arguments of the banker. The end of each round is marked by the same elements: an assault inflicted on the interlocutor through a concluding argument and a subsequent silence. This silence is twofold, as on one hand the characters exchange words for movement – they stop speaking and use this opportunity to smoke, gesticulate or readjust themselves, in a stage direction sort of way – and on the other hand, these moments are followed by a typographical space that divides the plot and visually marks a temporary evolution (Fig. 5). The blank space, – even though nothing can be read in it – announces the end of an act, and represents the plateau leading to the peak as well as the pause in the script that allows us to see the props: the smoke, the cigarettes, the hands (yes, the characters have bodies!), and that nameless restaurant that acts as a setting.

As we can see, the story is made up of a chain of apparently distorted concepts. On one hand, logic does not fulfill the purpose of reasoning. As Sapega explains, “the principles of logic have been manipulated by the protagonist in order to arrive at a conclusion that is in essence false, that is, the method of logical reasoning has betrayed its purpose, which is to discover the truth” (1989: 113). Therefore, logic fulfills a self-destructive role, and as Sapega concludes, it is the tool that the banker uses to prove that logic cannot be the instrument to understand the world. Nevertheless, this same logic leads to an apparently ridiculous conclusion, and in the meantime, the illogical serves as a tool for reasoning, that is, *plays the role* of logic. On one hand, we are dealing with two characters of incompatible nature, one a banker and at the same time an anarchist, and, the other, a man of dialogue who does not actually dialogue any idea of his own. Both represent opposite ideas, but their counter-arguments turn out to be useless since they do not fulfill their original role and function. Here, distorted, they take on the task of contravening, with the purpose of no longer destroying the argument but, instead, merging with it. Therefore, in harmony with the semantic distortion, the significance of *duo*-logue loses its double essence and is transformed into a concealed *mono*-logue.

tenho uma vida como a dos typos dos syndicatos e das bombas — isso é verdade. Mas é a vida d'elles que está fóra do anarchismo, fóra dos ideaes d'elles. A minha não. Em mim — sim, em mim, banqueiro, grande commerciante, açambarcador se v. quizer —, em mim a theoria e a practica do anarchismo estão conjunctas e ambas certas. V. comparou-me a esses parvos dos syndicatos e das bombas para indicar que sou differente d'elles. Sou, mas a differença é esta: elles (sim, elles e não eu) são anarchistas só na theoria; eu sou-o na theoria e na practica. Elles são anarchistas e estupidos, eu anarchista e intelligente. Isto é, meu velho, eu é que sou o verdadeiro anarchista. Elles — os dos syndicatos e das bombas (eu também lá estive e saí de lá exactamente pelo meu verdadeiro anarchismo) — elles são o lixo do anarchismo, os fêmeas da grande doutrina libertaria.

— Essa nem ao diabo a ouviram! Isso é espantoso! Mas como concilia v. a sua vida — quero dizer a sua vida bancaria e commercial — com as theorias anarchistas? Como o concilia v., se diz que por theorias anarchistas entende exactamente o que os anarchistas vulgares entendem? E v., ainda por cima, me diz que é differente d'elles por ser mais anarchista do que elles — não é verdade?

— Exactamente.

— Não percebo nada.

— Mas v. tem empenho em perceber?

— Todo o empenho.

Elle tirou da bocca o charuto, que se apagára; reacendeu-o lentamente; fitou o phosforo que se extinguia; depol-o ao de leve no cinzeiro; depois, erguendo a cabeça, um momento abaixada, disse:

— Oíça, Eu nasci do povo e na classe operaria da cidade. De bom não herdei, como pode imaginar, nem a condição, nem as circumstancias. Apenas me aconteceu ter uma intelligencia naturalmente lucida e uma vontade um tanto ou quanto forte. Mas esses eram dons naturaes, que o meu baixo nascimento me não podia tirar.

«Fui operario, trabalhei, vivi uma vida apertada; fui, em resumo o que a maioria da gente é naquella meio. Não digo que absolutamente passasse fome, mas andei lá perto. De resto, podia tel-a passado, que isso não alterava nada do que se seguiu, ou do que lhe vou expor, nem do que foi a minha vida, nem do que ella é agora.

«Fui um operario vulgar, em summa; como todos, trabalhava porque tinha que trabalhar, e trabalhava o menos possivel. O que eu era, era intelligente. Sempre que podia, lia coisas, discutia coisas, e, como não era tolo, nasceu-me uma grande insatisfacção e uma grande revolta contra o meu destino e contra as condições sociaes que o faziam assim. Já lhe disse que, em boa verdade, o meu destino podia ter sido peor do que era; mas naquella altura parecia-me a mim que eu era um ente a quem a Sorte tinha feito todas as injustiças juntas, e que se tinha servido das convenções sociaes para m'as fazer. Isto era aqui pelos meus vinte annos — vinte e um o maximo — que foi quando me tornei anarchista.

Parou um momento. Voltou-se um pouco mais para mim. Continuou, inclinando se mais um pouco.

— Fui sempre mais ou menos lucido. Senti-me revoltado. Quiz perceber a minha revolta. Tornei-me anarchista consciante e convicto — o anarchista consciante e convicto que hoje sou.

— E a theoria, que v. tem hoje, é a mesma que tinha nessa altura?

— A mesma. A theoria anarchista, a verdadeira theoria, é só uma. Tenho a que sempre tive, desde que me tornei anarchista. V. já vae ver... Ia eu dizendo que, como era lucido por natureza, me tornei anarchista consciante. Ora o que é um anarchista? E' um revoltado contra a injustiça de nascermos deseguaes socialmente — no fundo é só isto. E de ahí resulta, como é de ver, a revolta contra as convenções sociaes que tornam essa desigual-

Fig. 5. *Contemporanea*, n.º 1, Lisbon, May 1922, p. 6.
First typographical space that indicates the twofold silence.

In order to match banking and anarchy it would be necessary, as a reader may conclude based on a dictionary and common sense, that at some point in the journey from antonymy to synonymy, a distortion of meaning is necessary in order to establish an equivalence. However, this is precisely what the banker warns he will avoid:

—Essa é boa! V. anarchista! Em que é que v. é anarchista? Só se V. dá á palavra qualquer sentido diferente...

—Do vulgar? Não; não dou. Emprégo a palavra no sentido vulgar.

—Quer V. dizer, então, que é anarchista exactamente no mesmo sentido em que são anarchistas esses typos das organizações operarias? Então entre V. e esses typos da bomba y dos syndicatos não ha differença nenhuma?

—Differença, differença, ha [...] Quanto á práctica sou tão anarchista como quanto ás theorias. E quanto á práctica sou mais, sou muito mais, anarchista que esses typos que V. citou. Toda a minha vida o mostra [...] Entre as minhas theorias e a práctica da minha vida não ha divergencia nenhuma, mas uma conformidade absoluta [...] Em mim —sim, em mim, banqueiro, grande commerciante, açambarcador se v. quizer—, em mim a theoria e a practica do anarchismo estão conjunctas e ambas certas.

(Pessoa, 2013: 52-53)

[—Good heavens! You an anarchist! How can you be an anarchist? Unless you give the word some meaning which is quite different...

—From the common one? No, I don't. I used the word in the usual sense.

—Do you mean to say then that you are an anarchist in exactly the same sense these trade union chaps are anarchists? So there's no difference between you and these bomb and strike beggars?

—Oh, yes: there *is* a difference [...] In practice I'm as much an anarchist as in theory. And in practice I'm much more —oh ever so much more— of an anarchist than those chaps you mentioned. All my life proves it [...] Between my theories and the practice of my life there is no antagonism, but an absolute conformity [...] In me —yes, in me, tha banker, the great merchant, the profiteer, if you like— the theory and the practice of anarchism are joined and both right.]

(Pessoa, 2013: 150)

We have a man who defines anarchism as a rebellion “contra a injustiça de nascermos deseguaes *socialmente*”[“against the injustice of being born *socially* unequal”] (Pessoa, 2013: 53). To arrive at his final justification, the banker's argument is weaved based on the following chain of premises. First, social fictions are bad, and one can fight against them unlike natural injustices, which escape our control. In other words, we can fight against the fact of having been born poor but not against having been born less intelligent than others. Second, the only practical solution is anarchism, given that any other system – such as socialism, communism or dictatorship – is no more than the substitution of one social fiction for another. The banker illustrates this position with the Russian and French Revolutions, as well as the history of civilization. Third, the only transitory system that could exist in the passing from a traditionalist society to a free society would be a system of mental preparation for freedom, since it is impossible to physically prepare for something that does not exist. In other words, the transition must be immediate. Fourth, if it is impossible for society to reach its natural state – that is, freedom – and, if by definition society needs fictions and conventions, the current situation is the best option. Even though it is not natural, the current state is that which most resembles a natural one, given that people perceive it as a long-lasting

habit. Fifth, if anarchists strive for freedom of others and themselves, the process should not threaten future freedom, but instead create as much as possible without fomenting new tyrannies. Sixth, fighting for the freedom of others without expecting a selfish compensation is not natural, and by being fictitious it is a punishable aspiration just like the fictions anarchists fight against. Finally, it is also unnatural to fight for an objective whose realization is uncertain.

These assumptions, argued to perfection, would not be enough without the final gear. Based on this, how does one arrive at the conclusion that not only is it possible to dedicate oneself to banking and anarchism at the same time, but that doing so is, in fact, the only logical way out? First, the banker justifies his decision of individually exercising anarchism behind the argument that new tyrannies are created within groups. In an organization of activists, some end up imposing themselves over others, and when there is no money or social conventions in between – only a struggle – this tyranny is not derived from fictions. Even worse: it is a new tyranny. Second, banking provides a selfish satisfaction that makes the anarchic battle something natural. Making money means avoiding the simulation of hypocritical altruism that is as harmful as social fictions. Third, working as a banker does not contravene anarchy's aim since what one desires to destroy are not the capitalists – the men or the media – but the capital: “E v. decerto não julga que abolindo as facas abole os assassinos” [“And you certainly do not believe that by abolishing knives you will abolish murderers”], says the banker to his interlocutor (Pessoa, 2013: 67). Fourth, the only way of freeing oneself from the social fiction that makes up capitalism is to become as rich as possible to the point of no longer depending on money and therefore being free of its influence while subjugating it. Fifth, banking is an old fiction for which the banker is not responsible. He just lives among a tyranny that is not new and was created by others. Sixth, the anarchist seeks freedom for himself and others, but forcing them to follow a system puts their liberties at risk, and one of the premises is to create as much freedom as possible without destroying the one that already exists in the present. If someone who is tyrannized prefers slavery to freedom, they are either less intelligent – a natural condition over which the banker has no control – or freedom contradicts their character, and forcing them to accept it would be a tyranny. Seventh, freeing oneself and no one else is the best the banker can do without reneging on any of his premises, and this is what differentiates him from the rest of the anarchists, who aspire to free others even when, in the practice, they default on all of their postulations. Therefore, the only anarchist who is *truly an anarchist* is the banker.

There have been plenty of attempts to denominate the argumentative magic of our main character: story of reasoning, dialectic satire, *reductio ad absurdum* or the result of a devilish reasoning capacity. In fact, all these labels could be applied to the story. On one hand, Pessoa was influenced by the idea of reasoning found in

Edgar Allan Poe's detective stories. On the other hand, in an irrefutable connection with the Socratic dialect, we see a master who overwhelms his disciple and gets him to contribute towards his own entrapment, all in favor of the argument.

This rhetoric, in occasions, also exudes the structure of the reduction to the absurd, that Aristotelian mathematical fallacy where the denial of an unsustainable thesis converts the assertion of this thesis into a supposedly true claim. That is, if anarchism is A and B, and those who call themselves anarchists *are neither A nor B but C and D*, then they *are not* anarchists. If the banker *is neither C nor D*, therefore he *is not* like them, which means that he *is not* like those who *are not* anarchists; consequently, he *is* an anarchist. Certainly, the similarity between the argumentative structure of the banker and the Aristotelian model is not accidental. Pessoa himself referred to this mechanism in a well-known aphorism: "A *reductio ad absurdum* é uma das minhas bebidas preferidas" ["The *reductio ad absurdum* is one of my favorite drinks"] (Pessoa, 2010: I, 501; Fig. 6).

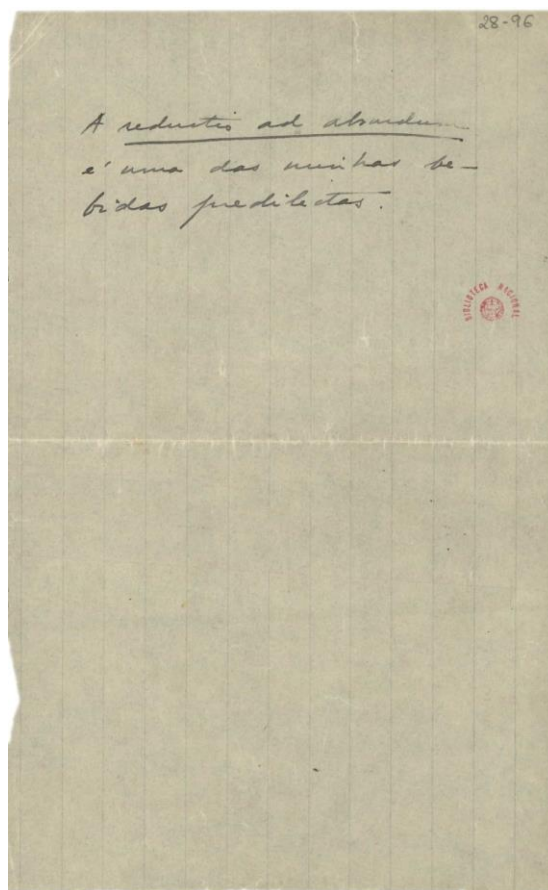


Fig. 6. BNP/E3, 28-96.

It is true that now and again the main character falls into tautologies: "Ora essas ficções sociaes são más porquê? *Porque são ficções*" ["Now, why are those social fictions bad? *Because they are fictions*"], he explains (Pessoa, 2013: 54). He also employs synonymies and antonymies that he establishes beforehand as absolute

truths, and defines concepts such as natural and artificial, thought and action, or selfishness and altruism, to later counter them with a semantic radicalism that, ironically, he never manifests at the time of explaining his own semantically problematic identity. In other words, he adheres to semantic rigor only when it is in his best interest.

Coming up with an accurate verdict is not that simple: if we stand before an impeccable logic or a gimmick. The story's linguistic structure is plagued with Gallicized constructions ("porque é que", "o que é")⁵, which favor circumlocution, deixis and repetition, and constantly refer the reader to another element within the same sentence. In most of the banker's phrases, such as "O que eu era, era inteligente" ["What I was, was intelligent"] (Pessoa, 2013: 53), the pronouns and antecedents – "que" and "o", respectively – establish an equality of reference of two linguistic elements whose redundancy of the nominal complement ("era inteligente") fulfill an expletory and reiterative function. This construction, from the linguistic point of view, emphasizes the idea that something is being explained, just like the sentences with the structure "porque é que", which nominalizes the interrogative adverbs and highlights the fact that what is being expressed is a question. All this is not fortuitous in a story that is based on a dispute of questions and explanations, where emphasis and repetition are of great importance in order to persuade. These Gallicized structures also tend to use verbs in the indicative mood with no room for subjunctive or hypothetical situations; an attribute that is directly linked to the persuasive stream the banker uses to impose a supposed factual reality.

On the other hand, these structures result in the depersonalization of the sentence, another aspect that does not seem gratuitous in a story whose men do not give importance to their names and rule out any individualist nomination. Here, the saying "arguments speak for themselves" attains a meaning beyond the figurative one, with characters who, through their self-denial, are not only escaping from the reader – or from any new interlocutor –, but also from any labeling attempt. In Baltrusch's opinion, these faint identities that lie behind overthrown masks are the tropes or leitmotif of the Pessoaan literary work (2010: 45). However, it does not mean that the banker constitutes an attempted character or an excuse for a political manifest.

The Gallicized structures appear next to another linguistic peculiarity, also present in many other texts written by Fernando Pessoa: the lack of subject-verb agreement. In *O Banqueiro Anarchista* we find a disagreement of grammatical persons in which subjects in the first person are followed by predicates conjugated in the second or third person: "eu é que sou o verdadeiro anarquista" ["I am the

⁵ Although less common, these structures are also present in English: "Why is it that [...]" and "What is [...] is".

one who is the true anarchist”]⁶ (Pessoa, 2013: 53). This, of course, sheds some light over the metaphorical reach of heteronymism, which is manifested here through a grammatical person who, simultaneously, appears to be someone else.

More than just a text with the purpose of exploring the strength of political arguments and the ambiguities in the art of rhetoric, the story – and its characters – are metaphors of language. When proving the correspondence between banking and anarchism, the banker’s task is not only limited to a simple semantic distortion of two concepts. His task – much more ambitious – represents a transformation of the language where a new linguistic universe emerges, one that destroys and builds at the same time, with concepts (like banking and anarchy) that are not only possible side by side, but mutually needed in order to exist. Extraordinarily, the main character insists that banking is the only profession that allows him to be an anarchist. This story is not about a banker finding an alternative – an exception – in which it is possible that both professions coexist. It is about the emergence of a new semantics in which anarchy is the constituent foundation of banking, and vice versa. In other words, one concept cannot exist or fully *be* without containing the other. This type of contradiction is something that Pessoa himself referred to as an inherent characteristic of nature. In a piece written for *Orpheu* magazine in 1916, he wrote: “Não há critério da verdade senão não concordar consigo próprio. O universo não concorda consigo próprio [...] O paradoxo é a fórmula típica da Natureza. Por isso toda a verdade tem uma forma paradoxal” [“There is no truth criteria other than disagreeing with yourself. The universe disagrees with itself (...) The paradox is Nature’s typical formula. That is why all the truth has a paradoxical shape”] (Pessoa, 1966: 217-218).

“[D]esde o principio da conversa lhe tenho dito e repetido que sou anarquista, que não só o fui mas o continuo sendo[.] Se eu tivesse tornado banqueiro e commerciante pela razão que V. julga, eu não era anarquista, era burguez” [“From the beginning of our conversation I have told you and repeated that I am an anarchist, that not only did I use to be one, but also that I still am. If I had become a banker and a merchant for the reasons you believe, I would not have been an anarchist, but a bourgeois”] (Pessoa, 2013: 57), says the banker. He demonstrates that if he were not an anarchist he would not be a banker either, and if his profession were made up of what his interlocutor understands as banking, in his semantic universe, this would require the use of a different signifier. Meanwhile, the banker destroys every notion of banking and anarchy known until then, and creates a new language that rewrites the history of words.

In a conversation of less than thirty pages, the banker metaphorizes the paradox of linguistic processes that are both creative and destructive, and that are

⁶ The fact that the subject-verb disagreement can be justified by the use of a Gallicized structure makes it difficult to find an exact English equivalent. A literal translation would be: “I is the one who is the true anarchist”.

usually slow: the erosion due to phenomena such as the principle of least effort that rules spoken languages; syntactic reconstruction through processes like grammaticalization, in which some signifiers lose their meaning and are transformed into syntactic elements or prepositions; and historical linguistic contradiction, expressed through words that speakers have inverted during centuries until they become exactly the opposite of what they originally meant (as it occurred with the word *nimio*, in Spanish, or *nice*, in English, for example). With this leap from one edge to the other, the banker – like languages – demonstrates the capriciousness of linguistic signs, the elastic possibilities of tongues and the weak barriers of logic.

Therefore, it would not make sense that the characters of this story had names, since what they *are* could never be properly represented or enclosed by fixed signs. It is, if anything, ironic, since these characters were created and written precisely by someone who carried the weight of dozens of men and names. Such as the banker, who concludes that it is possible to only free himself alone – to be the echo of his own battle –, in *Páginas Íntimas e de Auto-Interpretação* Pessoa states that a man must try to substitute himself and multiply his character, which, as Sapega points out, demonstrates that *O Banqueiro Anarquista* is in line with the heteronymic process. On one hand, it is consistent that the only way we can refer to the main character is through the oxymoron of his job, which entails a question about the impossibility of linguistic signs and the endless tension of representation: the story's concepts crash with their acoustic representation just like the anarchist collides with the system that claims to represent him. Thus, the banker's speech not only demonstrates the elusive quality of language but also implies that logic can outwit reality and push us away from the concepts we think we know, proving that altering the signs of reality, in the words of the Colombian critic Eduardo Jaramillo (2004), can hinder us from seeing the world any longer.

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