

The Vital Collapse—Apocalypse and New Paradise in Eça de Queiroz and Teixeira de Pascoaes

STEPHANIE LANG

[T]ous les êtres organisés, du plus humble au plus élevé, [...] ne font que rendre sensible aux yeux une impulsion unique, inverse du mouvement de la matière et, en elle-même, indivisible. Tous les vivants se tiennent, et tous cèdent à la même formidable poussée. [...] L'humanité entière, dans l'espace et dans le temps, est une immense armée qui galope à côté de chacun de nous [...], dans une charge entraînante capable de [...] franchir bien des obstacles, même peut-être la mort. (Bergson, *L'Évolution créatrice* 160)¹

Bergson's *élan vital* is one of the most optimistic expressions of a philosophical tendency around 1900 aiming at rehabilitating vital energy as a fundamental positive value. Halfway between physics and a diffuse metaphysical impulse, he creates an optimistic counterpart not only to the socio-biological sciences of late positivism, but also to the physical theories on entropy and degradation of energy which had given scientific support for the diffuse feeling of decay and *dégénérescence* in *fin-de-siècle* Europe: "Toutes nos analyses nous montrent en effet dans la vie un effort pour remonter la pente que la matière descend", Bergson writes (*L'Évolution créatrice* 146).² Here we have the other side of the Janus-faced problem of decay and renewal which eventually became an obsessive idea in 19th century Europe. This new optimism turns the idea of the continuous flow of energies and their convertibility (as transported in thermodynamics) into a chance of positive fulfilment of the loss of energy the supposed "decadent" period stands for. As an unproductive waste of vitality, decadence has now to be filled with the notion of a new *utility*, oriented towards future and society. Bataille's critical review of *dépense utile*,³ a "useful" spending of vital energies, allows one to put the value of such

1. “[A]ll organized beings, from the humblest to the highest, [...] do but evidence a single impulsion, the inverse of the movement of matter, and in itself indivisible. All the living hold together, and all yield to the same tremendous push. [...] the whole of humanity, in space and in time, is one immense army galloping beside [...] us in an overwhelming charge able to [...] clear the most formidable obstacles, perhaps even death” (Bergson, *Creative Evolution* 271).
2. “All our analyses show us, in life, an effort to remount the incline that matter descends” (Bergson, *Creative Evolution* 245).
3. For the notion of utility in French history of ideas, see Citti 114ss.
4. “Therein lies the new hope [...] And how glorious will be the awakening when such virginity [...] is held in derision, when fruitfulness is again recognised as a virtue, amidst the hosanna of all the freed forces of nature—man’s desires which will be honoured, his passions which will be utilised, his labour which will be exalted, whilst life is loved and ever and ever creates love afresh!” (Zola, *Paris*, Translated by Ernest A. Vizetelly).
5. Quotes from Eça de Queiroz, *A cidade e as serras*, in the following: CS, English translations quoted as CM.

utilitarian fulfilment into perspective, and makes clearer how deeply this project of overcoming is linked to its underlying counterpart consisting of excess and deliberated waste.

The “tremendous push” Bergson invokes for a triumphal victory of energy and life against the dark side of the “obstacles”, is also very present in Zola’s optimistic outcry for a renewed “*humanité en marche*”. If utopia enters the scientific empirical analysis of the naturalist literary project and if the closed cycle of a degrading and sterile family is replaced by a new regenerative cycle, then the unproductive spending and gratuitous excess are overwritten and the decadent degradation is redeemed by new practical and fertile values:

C’est là, enfin, la nouvelle espérance [...] Et quel réveil joyeux, lorsque la virginité sera méprisée, lorsque la fécondité redeviendra une vertu, dans l’hosanna des forces naturelles libérées, les désirs honorés, les passions utilisés, le travail exalté, la vie aimée, enfantant l’éternelle création de l’amour. (Zola, *Paris*, Livre VI V)⁴

This renewal is inevitably built upon the degenerative and death-oriented counterpart that still seems to shine through in every sentence. However, the decadent excess is quickly replaced by new excess, this time an exaggeration of positive productivity and vitality. The impossibility to keep the decadent excess under control by a “new” controlled spending of energies shows (following Bataille) the limits of the intended overcoming. Like Zola’s novels, Portuguese fictional texts must deal with the dilemma of how to articulate the ambiguous vital problem. Here, solutions for a new field of experimentation in excess seem not only to be

evoked in the sphere of nationalistic apologies, but also—and especially—in a deliberate meta-poetical play with different discursive modalities, finding their redemption in a renewed excessive writing.

Portuguese revolts against decay

In Portugal, Eça de Queiroz and Teixeira de Pascoaes correspond to two slightly different periods in the literary and the political field, but they both take part in the negotiation of contemporary ideas around 1900. The obsession with decay, topically assumed and aesthetically over-exploited, is an omnipresent phantasm in the interpretation and dramatization of both the people's and the Nation's destiny. Like for Zola, in their vision of regeneration, decay is a necessary but purifying preliminary stage—only the descent into hell can lead to a new paradisiacal overcoming. The motive of waste and loss of vital energies can illustrate this cathartic process, and shows how specific literary *topoi* are inverted and replaced within different textual surroundings, in order to negotiate the turn from descent to ascension.

Both Eça de Queiroz' novel *A cidade e as serras* (1901) and Teixeira de Pascoaes' epos *Marânus* (1911), regardless of evident differences in time, textual form and style, can be seen as creative answers to the problem of the decadent collapse and paradisiacal overcoming, answers which also show the latent continuity of excess as it underlies Zola's and Bergson's "tremendous push".

In Eça de Queiroz' novel *A cidade e as serras*⁵ the preliminary decadent stage is topically assumed, ironically overloaded and finally inverted. Jacinto, late offspring of a degenerated family, lives—like Huysmans' Des Esseintes—as an eccentric ego in the closed space of a luxurious interior in Paris, where he turns his disgust of the World into the creative alternative of refinement and artificiality. However, his constant attempt to "accumulate civilisation" (CS 29, CM 20) leads not to satisfaction but to anxiety and tedium, and to the awareness that life is pointless. Evasion of reality and an excess of stimuli (in art, philosophy etc.) provoke a typically "decadent" aboulia, i.e. a pathological loss of will power. Symptomatically, the recurrent motive of yawning is a suggestive expression of the "trouble he experiments in merely keeping alive":

[Jacinto] bocejava com descorçoada molleza. E nada mais instrutivo e doloroso do que este supremo homem do século XIX, no meio [...] dos seus trinta mil volumes repletos do saber dos séculos—estacando, com as

6. “[Jacinto yawned with depressed inertness.] Nothing could be more sadly instructive than the sight of this supremely gifted man of the nineteenth century in the midst of [...] the fifty thousand volumes filled with the knowledge of centuries—standing there defeated. With his hands in his pockets, and reflecting visibly in his facial expression and the flabby indecision of his yawns, the boredom, and trouble he experienced in merely keeping alive.” (CM 72).

7. “Ad manes, to the Shades of our Dead!” (CM 96) Like Maurice Barrès’ concept of the “Earth and the Dead”, Eça evokes a national orientation with Jacinto’s “back to the roots”. Portugal as a “shipwrecked” nation, in allusion to the failed colonial aspiration, is a constant reference, from the *Lusiads* up to Antero de Quental or Oliveira Martins. From outside the country, Unamuno also stylises Portugal as a “pueblo de naufragos”, and Portuguese history as a “trágico naufragio de siglos”, see Unamuno 52.

8. “Fortunate Jacinto! How true! [...] He stooped no longer as he walked. Over the listless pallor of super-civilization, the mountain air and the living of a more real life had spread the swarthy flush of renovated blood which had superbly made a man of him. From his eyes which had always seemed so crepuscular and lost to the world when he was in the City, there flashed the brilliance of noon, resolute and wide-sweeping, as if happy in being able to absorb the beauty of all things. [...] It was a new Jacinto!” (CM 137).

9. “A formidable-looking maid with huge breasts that shook about in the folds of the crossed kerchief on her bosom, (...) entered crushing the floorboards with a steaming earthenware soup tureen. [Jacinto] tasted a bigger spoonful [...], smiled, and said,

mãos derrotadas no fundo das algibeiras, e exprimindo, na face e na indecisão mole de um bocejo, o embaraço de viver! (CS 110s)⁶

When *ennui* almost defeats him and deprives him of his vitality and virility, renewal becomes necessary thus leading Jacinto from decadent Paris back to the idyllic rural Alentejo. The transition between those two parallel phases is consciously articulated as a symbolic crossing of frontiers between civilization and nature. Allusions to a symbolic opposition between hell and paradise convert this transition into a rite of passage, a transgression of a virtual vital frontier. Jacinto has to descend into the hell of decadence, in order to be reborn as a new man.

First, redemption needs purification. Symptomatically, the decadent excess of artificial overloading is redeemed by the radical return to emptiness and nudity. In the *rite de passage* of crossing the Portuguese border, Jacinto leaves all his baggage behind, and arrives empty-handed like a newborn child—or, even more drastically, like a shipwrecked man (“como naufragos”, CS 185)—in his new paradise. The allusion to the shipwreck not only allows the detection of a nature-oriented critique of civilisation, but also of the national(istic) project “ad manes” (CS 150).⁷

Emptiness is the first stage of the new biblical age Jacinto enters by going back to the roots. Silence in nature (“sem um sussurro”, CS 185 [“without a murmur”, CM 119]) and the elimination of all material goods (“sem uma cama, sem uma poltrona, sem um livro”, CS 204 [MC 131]) repeat an obsessive “without”, marking the vacuity of the renewal and offering a symbolical empty space. The depleted projection surface is ready for the systematic inversion of the decadent topics. Certainly, the empty space

might also refer to the “white page”: if Jacinto’s huge library gets lost on the way, the text itself is relieved of the burden of artistic references and opens up to the (literary) experiment of renewal.

With the renewal, vital energy is inscribed into the emptied body and redeems each of the topical decadent characteristics by positive inversion:

Afortunado Jacinto, na verdade! [...] Jacinto já não corcovava. Sobre a sua arrefecida pallidez de super-civilisado, o ar montesino, ou vida mais verdadeira, espalhará um rubor trigueiro e quente de sangue renovado que o viriliza soberbamente. Dos olhos, que na cidade andavam sempre tão crepusculares e desviados do Mundo, saltava agora um brilho de meio-dia, resoluto e largo, contente de se embeber na beleza das coisas [...] Era um Jacinto novíssimo. (CS 215)⁸

Décadence with its crepuscular ambiance and feminine connotation is transferred into “the brilliance of noon”, new force and virility. However, it is crucial that the excess has not been defeated but only inverted. The new regenerative excess is as pathological as its degenerative counterpart.

Eça—excess of decadence, excess of regeneration?

The way new energy is described clearly reveals the ironical exaggeration of redemption. A grotesque excess of the new cult of the body and its functions turns paradise into a carnivalesque setting. After the aseptic phase of decadence, the starving body internalizes vital energies with unrestrained gluttony. Thus, regenerative vital energy is not only exteriorly ascribed to the decadent body, but can also be devoured, filling up the emptiness of the body. Of course, it is not by accident that “santa gula” (CS 199 [“blessed appetite”, CM 128]) has erotic connotations underlining the process of virilisation:

Uma formidável môça, de enormes peitos que le tremian dentro das ramagens do lenço cruzado, [...] entrou esmagando o soalho, com uma terrina a fumar. [Jacinto] tornou a sorver uma colherada mais cheia [...] e sorriu, com espanto:—Está bom! [...] Santo Deus! Ha annos que não sinto esta fome... (CS 198)⁹

The *passage à l'acte* of gluttony corresponds with the internalisation of a new masculinity, expressed in Work and Procreation. The compensation of tedium by a new excessive activism shows the limits of the new utility:

in amazement: 'It's good!' [...] "Good God. It's years since I felt such hunger!" (CM 127).

10. Original quote: "Depois de tanto *commentar*, o meu Príncipe, evidentemente, aspirava a *crear*.—É curioso... Nunca plantei uma árvore!" (CS 238).

11. Original quote: "quaes são as arvores que crescem mais depressa?" (CS 240).

12. "Jacinto threw out roots [...] which attached him to the wild sierra. It was as if he had been planted as a sapling in that ancient soil from which his race had sprung. And it was as if that ancient earth dissolved in him, flowed through him and penetrated him entirely so as to transform him into a rural, almost vegetable Jacinto..." (CM 157).

13. See Pinheiro Torres; Tamen 29 also points out a "continuity" between the two phases.

14. "[...] appeared my cousin Joanhinha. Her cheeks, from walking about in the sunny garden were suffused with a delicate pink, and her pale dress, slightly opened at the neck, showed up the splendid whiteness of her skin against the pale gold of her curly hair [...] A fat healthy baby, barely covered by its little shirt, nestled in her arms" (CM 201).

15. "And now five years have passed over Tormes and the sierra, it is the vintage time and the roses are all in bloom. My Prince is now no longer the last of the Jacintos—Jacinto, full stop—for in the old house which was falling into decay two lively children run; Terezinha my fat and rosy god-daughter and [...] Jacintinho" (CM 201).

"After so much mere *comment*, he was evidently set upon *creation*. [...] It's a queer thing: I have never planted a tree" (CM 152).¹⁰ If creative activity is a clear response to the vitalistic doctrine, the example of planting a tree could not be more apt. Thus, Jacinto's new excess arises with the same pathologic exaggeration, making the new supposedly static and constant paradise fall into a breathless accelerated fervour, when he asks: "What trees grow the quickest?" (CM 153).¹¹ Consequently, as an ultimate expression of his vitalistic fulfilment, Jacinto himself transforms into a plant. The internalisation of the vital energies is reduced to absurdity, utility loses its terrain again and has to yield to a deliberate excess, this time an excess of words and fantasy:

Jacinto lançara raízes [...] na sua ruda serra. Era realmente como se o tivessem plantado de estaca n'aquelle antiquissimo chão, de onde brotara a sua raça, e o antiquissimo humus refluísse e o penetrasse todo, e o andasse transformando n'um Jacinto rural, quasi vegetal... (CS 247)¹²

By the new excessive accumulation of vitalistic imageries the regenerative code itself becomes porous, and dissolves the meticulously established separation line between *Cidade* and *Serras*, i.e. between the degenerative and the regenerative stage.¹³ If the codes become permeable, the question arises whether the renewal can keep its claim of overcoming, or whether the flexible negotiation of literary patterns can merely respond to an aesthetic *blague*.

In Eça's novel the aspect of fertility is highly exemplary. Jacinto's potential wife Joanninha corresponds to the new ideal of vitality, and as

such has to contribute to Jacinto's own vital renewal. The new feminine type, as schematic as the typical decadent *femme fatale*, now stands for a serene happiness, a perennial neoclassical/Renaissance beauty, and a subdued sexuality aiming at reproduction:

[...] apareceu minha prima Joanninha, còrada do passeio e do vivo ar, com um vestido claro um pouco aberto no pescoço, que fundia mais docemente, n'uma larga claridade, o esplendor branco da sua pelle, e o louro ondedo dos seus bellos cabellos—[...] e trazendo ao collo uma creancinha, gorda e còr de rosa, apenas coberta com uma camisinha. (CS 319)¹⁴

The narrow opening of Joanninha's clothes already suggests that sensuality can merely follow an ordered course. Indeed, the potentially menacing sexual *élan* of the decadent *femme fatale* is now tamed by the notion of utility and dominated by controlled sexuality. In the paradisiacal setting amidst spring-like nature the image of resurrection is linked to the idea of Christmas, where the redemption also brings along the chance of a new age. Therefore it is crucial that the paradisiacal renewal also brings hope for a renewed mankind, an expansive and fulfilled progeny:

E agora, entre roseiras que rebentam, e vinhas que se vindimam, já cinco annos passaram sobre Tormes e as Serra. O meu Principe já não é o ultimo Jacinto, Jacinto ponto final—porque n'aquelle solar que decahira, correm agora, com soberba vida, uma gorda e vermelha Therezinha [...], e um Jacintinho... (CS 320)¹⁵

The supposed “full stop” of the sterile decadence is prolonged towards a borderless expanse, the “humanité en marche” can continue its way. However, the bucolic Christmas idyll also becomes porous. Just as the biblical references of paradise, Christmas or resurrection, Vergil and his bucolic *Georgica* follow secondary artistic sources that might substitute the *décadence* canon of literary references, but can certainly not dissolve the “decadent” dependence on an artificial set of accumulated notions. When Jacinto and his friend Zé eventually discuss the female protagonists, they reveal that all of their interpretations (also the regenerative ones) remain subjected to artistic stimuli. If Zé sees the servant Anna Vaqueira as a neoclassical Latin nymph, Jacinto unmasks their artistic idealisation and, at the same time, the deformed character of vitalistic reading:

16. “No, don’t let’s delude ourselves nor fabricate Arcadias. She’s a beautiful girl but stupid. There’s no more poetry [...] nor even more beauty there than in a fine Frisian cow. She deserves her name of Anna the Cow-Girl. She works well, digests well, conceives well” (CM 140).

17. Cf. “a minha afilhada Joanninha casou na matança do porco” (CS 24 [“My god-child Joanninha married in the autumn” CM 18]). The allusion gets lost in the English translation.

18. Henriques Bernardes Carvalho 71, against, for example, Piwnick 207.

19. All original quotes in the following: M. English translations are mine.

20. Antero de Quental 5. For Oliveira Martins, in *Portugal Contemporâneo*, the major “historical sin” is the colonial expansion. See also Machado Pires 107; Pinto Coelho 88s.

21. cf. “pálido, confuso” (M 170) or “ermo, crepuscular e vago” (M 201) [“pale, confuse” or “desert, crepuscular and vague”].

22. “Walker in the night, desert figure,/Conceived in the silence of sadness,/Oh, Portuguese pilgrim in search of adventure,/Your crazy voice attracts me!/And your very delirium seduces me.”

Não nos illudamos, nem façamos Arcadia. É uma bella môça, mas uma bruta. Não ha alli mais poesia [...], nem mesmo mais beleza do que n’uma linda vacca tourina. Merece o seu nome de Anna Vaqueira. Trabalha bem, digere bem, concebe bem. (CS 220)¹⁶

The fact that also Jacinto’s Madonna-like wife Joanninha is eventually introduced within the semantic field of the “vacca tourina”,¹⁷ can only underline the polyphony of the text and the ironic underfulfilment of the vitalistic schema. The codes of decadence and renewal overlap and invade foreign terrain, challenging the value of the prospective redemption. It is clear that Eça’s novel cannot be exhaustively described as an opposition of two ideological or stylistic models¹⁸ but needs to be seen as a deliberately creative and ironic translation of one excess into another. National connotations and ideological intentions seem to completely disappear behind the aesthetic play of exaggeration and grotesque overload.

Teixeira de Pascoaes—excess of redemption for the chosen people?

Teixeira de Pascoaes’ text *Marânus*¹⁹ also presents a Christmas-like scenery. This national-esoteric epos telling of a mythical union of the Portuguese land with its national spirit constitutes a foundational fiction of a renewed Portugal, following the orientation of Pascoaes’ politico-cultural project of the *Renascença Portuguesa* movement. In a very post-romantic move, cultural renewal is strongly linked to a re-encounter with the supposed essence of the Nation (for instance, *Saudade*) and a new liberation of its now hidden glorious potential. Here, the idea of redemption follows Oliveira

Martins' or Antero de Quental's obsessive idea of historical decadence. As Antero puts it, national decadence as a consequence of "historical sins" is a moral problem in need of redemption, i.e. a process of coming to terms with the national past.²⁰ Likewise, Teixeira de Pascoaes postulates emphatically remembering the national decadence in order to overcome this centuries-long purgatory in a redeeming and uprising renewal. Like in Eça's text, a creative amalgam of references is used for the articulation of renewal, including biblical paradise, Easter, Christmas and a Greco–Latin bucolic imagery. Likewise, the decadent counterpart remains the basis of the regenerative negotiation: descent into the hell of a decadent stage is the very condition for any New Age.

The homonym protagonist Marânus, offspring of the northern Portuguese landscape *Serra do Marão*, appears as a personification of the decadent Portuguese nation. His personal attributes and character are an exact reproduction of the current decadent topics²¹ making him an ideal representative of both individual and collective decadence. The necessity of fulfilment is once again articulated via the metaphor of hunger. Marânus' "fome secular", expressed in a form of Pessoaan disquietude *avant la lettre*, makes him obsessed with renewal and immortality (*M* 165). Unlike in Eça's text, his regeneration will not only consist of a contrasting inversion of literary topics, but rather in a radical revaluation of decadence itself. Indeed, it is exactly his tragic element that elevates Marânus and makes the redeeming encounter with Saudade possible. This genuine Portuguese goddess, personification of both the topical Portuguese national character and a diffuse messianic hope (Viçoso), quotes that she chooses the delirious Marânus to redeem his madness and sadness:

Caminhante nocturno, erma figura,
Gerado no silêncio e na tristeza...
Ó luso peregrino da Aventura,
Atrai-me a tua voz enlouquecida!
O teu próprio delírio me seduz. (*M* 177)²²

The very contrast between the dark, desperate scene of the "caminhante nocturno" and the resurrection of the new broad daylight also returns once more to the genuine Portuguese trauma of shipwreck:

23. "I see arise a golden morning sun/and an ethereal and creative happiness,/Oh, my sad soul got shipwrecked/in the oceanic depth of my tears!"

24. Concerning the myth of *sebastianismo*, see, for example, Quadros 83.

25. "[Arrives] the saviour/of the man who got lost in the high seas!/And now lies tired, almost dead, sleeping/on the beach [...] foam kissing his feet... and far far away/arises the eternal morning of fog...". For the translation see Pascoaes' own revealing comment: "*Nevoeiro* [...] is not an exact translation of, for example [...] of the English *fog*. The sense of this word is merely objective, only physical, whereas the word *nevoeiro* has for us a second, subjective and mysterious sense. [It] includes the idea of dream, coming appearance, expectation..."

(*A Saudade e o Saudosismo* 51).

26. "Oh Saudade! Oh Virgin Mother/Who will conceive, without sin,/on the Portuguese Land/The Christ of hope and beauty!/Oh new divinity, I will build for you/high in the Mountains, a beautiful altar [...] /There will be Bethlehem..."

27. "Into the world/ is carried the new God's luminous Word, who makes resurge/this strange spirit of *Saudade*".

28. "to redeem the people and the landscapes".

Vejo nacer doirada madrugada,
Uma alegria etérea e criadora,
Ó minha alma triste e naufragada
Na fundura oceânica das lágrimas! (M 169)²³

Again, the prospective redemption clearly alludes to the failed colonial Portugal and—with the topic of national decadence—to the mythical Messianic hope of *Sebastianism*.²⁴ As in Pessoa's *Mensagem*, the saviour the shipwrecked nation has to wait for, appears in the fog of sunrise:

"[Vem ao mundo] O redentor/De quem andou, perdido, no alto mar!/E de cansado, quase morto, dorme/Sobre a praia [...] Beija-lhe os pés a espuma [...] E ao longe, ao longe/Nasce a eterna manhã de nevoeiro..." (M 276).²⁵

As the climax of Pascoaes' "religious codification of *Pátria*" (Viçoso 97), *Saudade* offers, like Eça's regenerative scenery, a deliberate superposition of discursive traditions and suggestive images. Between a supratemporal Hellenic goddess and a specific national version of the Christian Madonna, *Saudade* negotiates several models of redemption that all together create a renewed Messianic hope, surmounting and transcending the old occidental myths of redemption. The Christian myth of Christmas is translated into a specific Portuguese "Nova Profecia":

Ó Saudade! Ó Virgem Mãe
Que sobre a terra portuguesa
Conceberás, isenta de pecado
O Cristo da esperança e da beleza!
Ó nova Divinidade, eu quero erguer-te,
No mais alto da Serra, um belo altar, [...]
Alí, será Belém... (M 218)²⁶

In the Portuguese *Serra*, like in Eça's edenic *Serras*, new Bethlehem and the Greek Olympus come together guaranteeing a regeneration which clearly surmounts the individual needs, on behalf of a collective, national or even universal redemption. The fact that this general salvation originates from the very Portuguese terrain, can only underline how deeply the messianic hope is rooted within the very national decadence, base and precondition of the new overcoming.

The “tremendous push” consists of a complete conversion of energy, and recharges the national imagery with a new, positive meaningfulness. The decisive moment of the conversion is a collective expiation of decadence and consists of collectively assuming the decadent stage. The shepherds of the Christmas setting stand for the active role community has to play in order to make the renewal productive for the future. That this future clearly exceeds the national borders in the form of universal redemption is visible in the scenery of the shepherds. Indeed, the scene at the manger is raised to a cosmic world theatre, by the presence of not only the simple shepherds, but no less than the natural forces “Spring”, “Sun”, “Night” etc. Here, at the latest, national collective is surmounted by the chance of universal redemption. In this mythical fulfilment, the New Age brings a new religious system, based on the adoration and apostolic succession of Saudade. With *saudosismo* she doesn't only claim a new theological system but also initiates the missionary expansion through a renewed paradisiacal world in a new primal state:

“[N]o mundo/Se percute [...] seu [do novo Deus] verbo iluminado, em que ressurge/Aquele estranho espírito saudoso/Deste Povo” (*M* 300).²⁷

It is evident that in Pascoaes' national-esoteric new religion, the spirit of the “povo” does no longer comprehend only the Portuguese people but makes “povo” plural: Messiah comes to earth “para salvar os povos e as paisagens” (*M* 276),²⁸ opening a “Era lusíada” for all mankind. This new Age aims at transgressing both the Greco–Roman and the Christian Age into a new spiritual and cultural system. This pretension of *translatio religionis* expresses the very self-confidence Pascoaes' supposedly decadent Portugal regains. The obsession with newness is also reflected on a meta-poetical level. Thus, *translatio religionis* also claims its own foundational fiction, its Bible—and finds it in Pascoaes' very poetics of renewal.

In both texts we observe that genuine national concepts fade into the background. Rather than drafts for political regeneration, the Portuguese renewals represent creative aesthetic experiments. The decadent excess is resolved into a new excess of poetical overload—into the excessive literary project of creating new worlds—and self-declares the poetical text a new Bible for a very personal utopia of poetic New Age. The “louca aventura” of failed imperial power in Portugal can find a new area of operation, the spiritual and poetical exaltation. On his part, Eça’s deliberate play with exaggeration and grotesque overload also diverges from any ideological message. Inversion of the decadent bases becomes a meta-poetical play with different discursive modalities, and the overcoming of the decadent yawning or *ennui* Jacinto suffers from leads to a celebration of poetical fulfilment. These poetical programs as sometimes subversive, sometimes apologetic versions of the collapse and paradisiacal overcoming represent the new condensation of vital energies. The creative energies that got lost during the decadent stages can be redeemed by a new, self-confident literary excess.

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ABSTRACT

Fin-de-siècle Europe seems obsessed by the Janus-faced problem of decay and renewal, halfway between the socio-biological sciences of late positivism and the emerging vitalistic theories, where accumulation, waste and loss of vital energies are a constant reference.

In Portugal, Eça de Queiroz and Teixeira de Pascoas both share the obsession with decay, an often topically assumed and aesthetically over-exploited phantasm in the dramatization of the Nation's destiny. For their visions of regeneration, decay is a necessary but purifying preliminary stage—only the descent into hell can lead to a new paradisiacal overcoming. In the narrative texts *A Cidade e as Serras* (1901) and *Marânus* (1911), Eça and Teixeira present sometimes apologetic, sometimes subversive versions of this energetic collapse. With different strategies of inversion, deformation and ironic overfulfilment these texts discuss not only a nationalistic but also—and above all—a poetic overcoming.

BIOGRAPHY

Stephanie Lang MA, born in 1983 in Munich, studied Roman Literatures and Archaeology at Munich, Bordeaux and Tarragona. She is currently working on a PhD about anti-decadent movements on the Iberian Peninsula. Since 2011 her research is supported by the Research Institute for History and Culture (OGC) at Utrecht University.

