

O Único Imperador Que Tem, Deveras . . .

Some time ago, as I was preparing a piece on Fernando Pessoa's book of poems entitled *Mensagem* (1934), I found myself writing—in the same way as I had spoken and had heard others speak—about the four culminating poems of "Brasão" the book's first section: that the figures depicted therein assume "monumental" proportions. That is, they are presentationally gigantic and/or superhuman; by virtue of the visual nature of their presentation, they assume emblematic status. The poems dedicated to those figures—Nun'Álvares Pereira, Prince Henry the Navigator, King John II, and Afonso de Albuquerque—, as is well known, "read" the heraldic devices of "Coroa" ("Crown") and "Timbre" ("Crest") that sit atop the Portuguese royal Coat-of-Arms, just as the fifteen poems preceding them "read" the various devices of the Coat-of-Arms itself, the "Castellos" ("Castles") "Quinas" ("Shields"), and the two heraldic "Campos" ("Fields") upon which the first two are set.

After writing of the four poems; "monumental" status, I left the notion there, as a descriptive observation. I had, however, long been bothered by the word *deveras* in the penultimate line of the first of the three "Timbre" poems, the one dedicated to Prince Henry. The entire poem reads as follows:

A CABEÇA DO GRYPHO O INFANTE D. HENRIQUE

Em seu throno entre o brilho das esferas,
Com seu manto de noite e solidão,
Tem aos pés o mar novo e as mortas eras—
O unico imperador que tem, deveras,
O globo mundo em sua mão.

[The Head of the Griffin Prince Henry

On his throne amid the shining of the spheres,
with his cloak of night and solitude,
he has at his feet the new sea and the dead eras—
the only emperor truly to have
the orb in the palm of his hand.]¹

Deveras, of course, calls for a comparison. If Henry is the only "emperor" who has *deveras* the *globo mundo em sua mão*, I asked myself, what is the negative side of the allusion and how is it construed? Have there been other "emperors" who seemed to control the whole world, but who ultimately did not? That is the cursory reading of the lines,

to which I then clung despite its problematic nature. But why refer to Henry as an "emperor" when he clearly was not one in any political sense and could be so conceived only by considerable metaphorical extension? Why speak of him as having "deveras, /O globo mundo em sua mão" when, both in terms of history and in the immediate context of *Mensagem*—i.e., in the two following poems—he is shown by comparison to have been an initiator whom others followed on a much grander scale? The only answer I could come up with involved Henry's figurative holding of a world globe. This construction, along with the notion of great worldly dominion—i.e., the parts of Africa that his initiatives explored and controlled during his lifetime—would lead to a large, ambiguous reference. The problem was that such a reference, in its invocation of a world globe, contained an obvious and frequently noted anachronism: cartography in Henry's time relied on Ptolemaic rather than Copernican concepts.

Some time later, in going through titles on a list of Pessoa's readings, I came across a reproduction of Oswald Wirth's tarot Emperor,² symbol of organizational power and dominion. He sits in profile on a throne with a globe in his left hand. The connection was obvious. The conception of the tarot Emperor as the basis of the Pessoa reference reordered my thinking on the issue. It sent me to work on tarot to a greater extent than before,³ and in the final analysis, greatly affected my reading of the entire first section of *Mensagem* in ways that I believe account for much more of the language of the book than I had theretofore been able to do. What I intend to do in the ensuing pages is to argue that seeing the reference in the Henry the Navigator poem as one to the tarot Emperor provides a reading much superior to any before proposed. It also establishes the basis for an understanding of "Brasão" that is in similar ways more successful than previously stated or implied in any treatment of the subject. To make that comparative point, I shall occasionally allude, without documentation, to a strawman that is my composite of the various treatments that I have read or heard of the first part of *Mensagem*, among them my own prior reading. Indeed, I have already made a number of such allusions. Finally, I shall make a few closing remarks about what my revised reading of "Brasão" has to say for a Pessoaan "reading" of Portuguese history.

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Above all else, seeing the tarot Emperor as the primary reference leads to an unproblematic reading of the poem. Henry is depicted in a scene that is very like renditions of the tarot Emperor, a presentation that has two primary effects. First, it sets up a comparison, visual in basis, that serves in several ways as the foundation of the poem. Second, it contains that multiple comparison in a visual emblem verbally rendered, which is much like the emblem that is the tarot trump itself. It is as though Henry were a meta-Emperor and the poem were a verbal "reading" of a tarot card showing *him* as an Emperor truer than the tarot

Emperor itself. That exchange, of course, resolves the problems that I had with my earlier interpretation of the poem. Henry as tarot Emperor is clearly an "emperor," does sit in a magus-like pose, and does have the *globo mundo*—now the symbol of arcane power rather than the world globe—in one of his hands.⁴

As I have attempted to demonstrate elsewhere,⁵ *Mensagem* embodies a very specific poet-reader relationship, one in which the persona/poet is an occult master leading his reader/initiate in an ascent up a three-levelled scale of spiritual awareness of, and interpretive insight into, nationality. It is a sort of dual epic journey through symbols taken from the national past. This is hardly the place to repeat that argument. I shall merely remark here that in the ascent/journey the first step, represented by "Brasão," the book's first section, concentrates on the physical world of the neophyte, hence on the "physical" Coat-of-Arms and the "physical" historical figures who are made to correspond to the devices of the Coat-of-Arms. That "physical" concentration is two-fold: the concentration of the duo of poet/reader, or master/neophyte, falls mainly on the "physical," historical existence of these figures, while those characters' own concentration by and large falls on worldly concerns. Nevertheless, within the "physical" concentration, there is revealed the material, so to speak, for interpretation from the vantage point of higher occult levels, interpretations in fact carried out in the second and third parts of the book. That material is revealed in "Brasão" in several ways, one of which, being repeated, hints that in their worldly concentration the historical personages play destined roles in a cosmic structure, whether they are aware of so doing or not. A second mode of that revelation is the structuring of Portuguese history that "Brasão" propounds. For both of these elements, realization that Prince Henry is the tarot Emperor provides a key ordering element. The latter is most important for present purposes and will be developed here.

"Brasão" begins with a presentation of heroes (the "Castellos") and of martyrs (the "Quinas") in the first two poems of the book; the two "Campos" are in multiple ways "background" to their corresponding series of poems. The reading of history is propounded mainly in the "Castellos," where we begin with "pre-Portuguese" figures such as Viriathus and such Burgundian figures as Count Henry, Tareja, King Afonso Henriques, and King Denis. All of those figures are outlined with biographical data widely and somewhat loosely used. When we come to the culminating seventh "Castello," we find it bipartite: one half refers to King John I, the other, to his wife, Philippa of Lancaster—founders of the royal House of Avis, of imperial expansion and glory, and so on. They are also parents of the so-called "íncrita geração," five sons who ruled, led the expansion, etc., among them, the aforementioned Prince Henry the Navigator. Four of the five sons, except Henry whose position later in "Brasão" we have already seen, follow as the first four "Quinas," martyrs to the course their parents initiated. But all, in the *Mensagem* version are willing to accept martyrdom for the cause ("the Gods sell when

they give," reads the "background" poem to the "Quinas," and it goes on to explain the bargain: "glory" is "bought" with "des-graça").

In the bipartite seventh "Castello", which is the pivotal element in a developing reading of Portuguese history, diction changes drastically. Examination of bits of language from each poem will suffice to make the point. King John is referred to as "Mestre, sem o saber, do Templo/Que Portugal foi feito ser" (the verbal phrase is at least trebly ambiguous); and Philippa is called "Prinzeza do Santo Gral." Familiarity with the diction of the various occultist materials that Pessoa is known to have read facilitates a comparison suggesting that both figures are thus given high occult status. This also leads to the conclusion that the seventh "Castello" represents the union of male and female principles, a union that is referred to in esoteric lore as the "hermetic marriage," in which cosmic wholeness is achieved and a plenitude of worldly power—created by perfect consonance between human forces and occult cosmic forces, between internal and external structures—is realized.⁶ The last "Castello" thus contains a gnostic reading of the historical centrality of the start of Avis: Portugal's acquisition of creative cosmic balance. And it was that creativity that underlay the "glorious" history of the empire.

What follows, then, is not surprising. After the martyrology of the first four "Quinas," sons of Avis, we get King Sebastian as the fifth "Quina" and then our four "monuments," all dedicated to heroes of the Avis expansion. The gnostic tenor established in the seventh "Castello" in essence justifies a series of changes in rhetoric through the rest of "Brasão," changes that, moving to increasingly abstract and idealistic formulations, culminate in the final four "monumental" emblems.

That those four poems were "monumental" was clear all along, as was the fact that they were in some sense emblems—i.e., the poetic voice describes the physical detail of a symbolic pose in which each personage is found. The emblematic status of some or all, which had as its reference a specific set of emblems, namely the cards in the tarot deck, and which continued a gnostic reading of Portuguese history through complex comparisons such as we have seen at work in the poem on Prince Henry, was by no means clear until the comparison with the tarot Emperor suggested itself.

It is, I suspect, clear that I see other "monumental" poems as linked to the tarot deck as well. Incidentally, all four were written in late 1928, the last three on the same day, September 26, in a book composed of poems written over a twenty-one year span, that contiguity may betoken commonality of reference as well. While no case is as clear as with Prince Henry, I suspect that Nun'Álvares Pereira, with his sword cutting the air and creating a halo around him, is the tarot Magician, while the gigantic King John II is probably The World and Albuquerque Justice. (Incidentally, the hermetic marriage is also depicted in tarot, in The Lovers; thus the tarot references may start as early as the last "Castello," though the hermetic marriage is a frequent esoteric motif, and too, in the seventh "Castello," the rhetoric is far from emblematic.)

And I should go back to the poem preceding the final four in the section, to the last "Quina," which depicts King Sebastian. While the rhetoric of the poem is not like that of the four "monumental" poems that close "Brasão," neither is it, quite, like that of the preceding four "Quinas." The poem, seen within the structure of "Brasão," is in fact transitional between sections, just as were the poems of the seventh "Castello"—indeed, the first "Castello," which is very much a "background" poem like the two "Campos" that precede it. The fifth "Quina" is in fact the first reference to King Sebastian that we get in *Mensagem*; the imagery and lore surrounding him will, of course, be widely cultivated at the end of the book's second section and throughout the third, "O Encoberto," as the poet/reader duo reach ever more esoteric advantages of the national experience they share. This first appearance of Sebastian begins with the lines "Louco, sim, louco, porque quiz grandeza/Qual a Sorte a não dá," and ends with the famous lines, repeated more than once in Pessoa's work: "Sem a loucura que é o homem/Mais que a besta sadia/Cadaver addiado que procria?" This, I think, is the tarot Fool, forerunner of the Joker of playing cards, the "wild card" that can appear at any time and take any form. In *Mensagem*, fittingly, the melding of Sebastian and the Fool results in the symbol of *Portuguese creativity* that began dimly with Viriathus, reached active status with the inception of Avis, led to the empire, its loss, and, since it informs Portuguese nationality—albeit latently—, can be recalled. *Mensagem*, through its ritual, is in essence proposing itself as the agent of such a recovery. It is thus both cultivator and incarnation of that national universal, that "wild card" that Sebastian as the Fool symbolizes.

According to Cavendish,⁸ interpreter of various lines of analysis about the tarot deck:

[The Fool's] madness links him not with the human but with the divine. In the ancient world the insane were regarded with awe because their madness showed that they were in the grip of a god or a spirit. There is similarly an old Christian tradition of the fool as someone closer to God than other men. The simpleton, at one remove from the complexities of everyday life with which he is helpless to cope, has a better set of values and a clearer perception of God than ordinary mortals, who are entangled in the complexities and unable to see beyond them. . . . The old positioning of the Fool in twenty-first place had the advantage of connecting the card with the Hebrew letter *shin*, which in the Cabala is the letter of the Holy Spirit. The *Sefer Yetsirah* linked *shin* with fire, and the shape of the letter suggested the tongues of fire which rested on the apostles on the Day of Pentecost, when they became possessed by the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues. Some of the astonished onlookers muttered that the Christians must be drunk, but St. Peter quoted to them from the Old Testament prophet Joel: 'And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. . . . Eliphaz Lévi took up this theme in connecting the Fool of the Tarot with prophesy and divination, clairvoyance, precognitive dreams, premonitions and mysterious inti-

mations of truth. Other authors have identified the Fool as the dreamer and visionary, in closer communion with God than is given to most men.

(pp. 59-62)

Pessoa was almost surely familiar with Levi's work and definitely was familiar with several other of the systematizations that Cavendish synthesizes.⁹

A similar excerpt from Cavendish about the Magician reads:

He is usually called the Magician or Magus in modern packs and is given a dignified and earnestly spiritual look. . . . The card is generally seen as a symbol of creative power, will and intelligence of God and man, of dominance, individuality and action. The Juggler's [i.e., Magician's] gesture is the key factor in most interpretations. It is taken to demonstrate the magical principle of 'as above, so below', that as God is in heaven, so man is on earth. . . . The Juggler's hand is raised to show the transmission from on high of the vital energy of the godhead—the Divine White Brilliance of Kether. He is the gigantic active and creative potential of God and man.

(pp. 67-69)

On the Emperor, Cavendish writes:

. . . the Emperor stands for the dynamic principle, or 'the great energizing forces' which penetrate and organize everything passive and potential. . . . The old packs frequently show the Emperor in profile, and this is taken to indicate that he is the outward and visible aspect of a power whose other side is concealed. The Emperor is God as father and maker. In him the divine creative potential of the [Magician] becomes actual and works in the universe to generate life and mould form.

(p. 80)

The point of all this is to give some idea of the additional "language"—language associated with the various cards—the reference to tarot which pours into the *Mensagem* diction at the end of "Brasão."

It is, to be sure, only one more layer of discourse in the already heavily-layered edifice of *Mensagem*, "Brasão" being the most complex of all the sections in this respect. First, what we read is already set up as a ritual, with us, the readers (leaving aside the problem that we are academic readers and not the readership projected in 1934) as neophytes to be initiated. We must see historical detail as exemplary of inherent potentialities and future promise rather than as an ingredient in any other sort of historical narrative. Second, we have the discourse of the visual Coat-of-Arms, with its traditional explication—the "Quinas" symbolizing the thirty silver pieces for which Christ was betrayed, etc. Third, in addition to sporadic esoteric references we have the relatively tight visual discourse and allied explanatory language of the tarot deck. All those layers of discourse—the last two having emblematic dimensions—, far from purely organizational or merely referentially reinforcing, in fact crisscross to expound a powerful reading of Portuguese history and of the notion of Portugueseness.

A number of concepts are promulgated: notions of force and universal authority—not so much historical as essential, to which history conforms (Henry's "emperorship" is more one of power than of possession)—linked to the age of expansion and, through the figure of Sebastian, to Portugueseness in general; the concept that history is at root a process of alignment of proper spiritual forces—in essence a closed, idealistic process; the idea that individual existence is essentially the same as the history so conceived, an individual life reaching its creative peak when the external (physical-biographical) and internal (spiritual-cosmic) are joined and balanced; the notion that history is structured around exceptional individuals who are defined according to gnostic principles; and, finally, the sense that Portugueseness is lived between the potential of the past and the potential of the future, is, then, overpowered by history past and history promised, the present being abstracted save for its structuring by those two potentialities. The last four poems of "Brasão," with their highly-layered dense discursive structure and tarot (or tarot-like; I cannot insist in the cases of the last two poems) referentiality in effect signal all of these notions.

It might be well in concluding this brief essay to examine the social dimension of the message so structured. Such a work is, to be sure, complex; it would hardly have been easily assimilated by the reader of its day. And now it is possible only after painstaking and, at best, partial reconstructions such as this one, operated on a portion of the larger book. Nevertheless, because of the systemic properties of the various, well-organized discourses that it piles one upon the other, it has a tightness to it in organizational as well as in specific rhetorical terms. That tightness is surely felt by any *Mensagem* reader and was surely felt by the reader of the time of its publication in 1934, even if that reader could only participate partially in its allusiveness.

In preparation from the late 1910's (the book's twelfth poem, of 1913, the only one composed earlier) to the early 1930's, *Mensagem* coincides with the era of debate over interpretation of national "reality" that would finally decide between the weak First Republic and a more "traditionalistic" form of social organization. Within that social and ideological struggle, *Mensagem's* profile is quite clear: it is highly "traditionalistic," emphasizing notions of inherent national characteristics, attachment to "traditional" structures, and the leadership of creative individuals over the opposition's emphasis on a "modern" social, economic, and political organization. *Mensagem* is, to be sure, highly idiosyncratic and very dense in its traditionalism, but that does not negate the point. Within the struggle over interpretation of reality, and hence of past and future, it is easily seen as a receiver of lines of debate, creator within and around them, and promulgator of a version—idiosyncratic but not for that ineffective—of the "traditionalistic" side.

As regards the tarot discourse that has been the focus of examination here, it in fact provides a code that defines a series of universal forces of a highly idealistic nature that man must embody for personal—and na-

tional—success. Seen in socio-political terms the tarot references thus provide one more traditionalizing ingredient, one that puts forth notions of universal forms according to which history and individual existence are structured. Within the fabric of *Mensagem*, that code is a very effective ingredient in the overall message.

We know how the struggle over “reality” in 1920’s Portugal came out: after Sidónio Paes’ *República Nova* of 1917–1918 (Pessoa eulogized Paes in a poem of 1920)¹⁰ came the military coup of 1926 (Pessoa defended it in a broadside of 1928),¹¹ which in the early 1930’s led to Salazar’s *Estado Novo* as, in many ways, the culmination of the line held by the “traditionalistic” forces. Let us look at some of Salazar’s language in regard to Portuguese history and Portugueseness. For him, the nation was:

A essência indefinível da continuidade histórica dos portugueses através dos séculos, como seu património material e moral. Devemos tudo a ela, tudo nós sacrificamos aos seus interesses superiores.¹²

To which one might add, on the subject of the nation and, simultaneously, of Portugueseness, a set of remarks on the “reality” of Portugal as a nation:

Esta realidade, em que englobamos a independência, a unidade orgânica e a missão civilizadora, é um pressuposto ou ponto de partida e foge a toda a discussão. E daqui este corolário: quem não é patriota não pode ser considerado português. Gostaria de saber se da Oposição o problema pode ser definido em iguais termos.¹³

Despite its idiosyncrasies, it should come as no surprise in light of the above quotations that the first two volume publications of *Mensagem* came out in relation to the *Estado Novo* initiatives and that individual *Mensagem* poems regularly appeared in *Estado Novo* publicity organs.

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NOTES

1. The text, and all subsequent references to *Mensagem* poems, come from Fernando Pessoa, *Obra Poética*, ed. Maria Aliete Galhoz, 3rd ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Companhia José Aguilar Editora, 1969). The translation, which aspires only to the quality of paraphrase, is my own.

2. Oswald Wirth, *L'Idéal Initiatique; Tel qu'il se dégage des Rites et des Symboles* (Paris: Le Symbolisme, 1927), 52. The reference comes from the presence among Pessoa's possessions of an invoice for the book; see António Pina Coelho, *Os Fundamentos Filosóficos da Obra de Fernando Pessoa* (Lisbon: Editorial Verbo, 1971), 43. As is known, Pessoa often resold books for the money to buy new ones.

3. Among the titles consulted were these that Pessoa either surely or almost surely (in the case of the first of them) knew: S. L. MacGregor Mathers, *Fortune-Telling Cards; The*

Tarot, Its Occult Signification (London: G. Redway, 1888), Oswald Wirth, *Le tarot des imagiers du moyen âge* (Paris: Le Symbolisme; E. Nourry, 1927), and Arthur Edward Waite, *The Pictorial Key to the Tarot* (London: W. Rider, 1922).

4. In the late 1960's or early 1970's I read, in a Portuguese magazine or literary supplement, a short article on the phrase "globo mundo" as it appears in this poem. In that publication it was pointed out that, our insistent popular etymology notwithstanding, the element "mundo" derives not from the substantive denoting 'world' but rather from the adjective *mundus* denoting 'elegant', 'polished'. The phrase thus carries no necessary implication of geography or cartography. Therefore, the publication suggested, we should not see such a reference in this poetic context. While I have been unable to locate the article and thus rely on my memory for this characterization, I would suggest instead that we should not summarily shut off such an implication on etymological grounds. Rather, we should see the phrase precisely as advancing an ambiguity between Portuguese historical "power" and an arcane spiritual "power" that is wholly meaningful in this context—an ambiguity which my present undertaking helps to set in a wider framework. The author of the publication to which I refer—and which has been instrumental to my thinking on this question—was, I believe, Américo da Costa Ramalho; I do not recall its title.

5. I refer to both the first part of my chapter "Pessoa: The Messenger," in *The Rediscoverers* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1981) and also "The Structure of Pessoa's *Mensagem*," *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, 59, No. 1 (Jan. 1982), 58-66.

6. For the motif, see S. L. MacGregor Mathers, *The Kabbalah Unveiled* (London: G. Redway, 1887), 28-29, 302 and E. Cahill, S. J., *Freemasonry and the Anti-Christian Movement* (Dublin: M. H. Gill and Son, 1949), 60-61. Pessoa possessed both titles, though not in these editions.

7. Yes, I do think that the correspondences, seen to this extreme, are funny. *Mensagem* is a network of reinforcing allusions, and I find several of them quite amusing in their intricacy. One may not, of course, attribute humor to the text unless language is somehow rhetorically marked as humorous. *Mensagem*, in its solemnity, seems nowhere to be so marked, but the layered and segmented nature of its discourse makes it impossible to be sure.

8. Richard Cavendish, *The Tarot* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975). Page numbers are incorporated into my text after each excerpt.

9. See n. 3. Cavendish alludes to the "Golden Dawn" school of tarot interpretation. Mathers, of course, was the leader of the "Golden Dawn" while Waite was an influential member and later reconstituter of the Society. Pessoa, as is well known, was in contact with another member of the "Golden Dawn," the renegade Aleister Crowley.

10. "A Memória do Presidente-Rei Sidónio Paes," reproduced in *Obra Poética*, 91-96.

11. *Interregno: Defesa e Justificação da Ditadura Militar em Portugal*, Manifesto do Núcleo de Acção Nacional (Lisboa, 1928).

12. From J. Ploncard d'Assac, *Dicionário Político de Salazar* (Lisboa: SNI, 1964), 184. "SNI," of course, was a government ministry.

13. António Oliveira Salazar, *Discursos e Notas Políticas*, IV (1943-1950) (Coimbra: Coimbra Editora, Lda., 1951), 356.