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## **The Crisis of the Mind in the Modern Age and Its Poetic Consequences. Examples from Texts by Joyce, Zamiatin and Pessoa**

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**Abstract:** This paper interrogates some of the utopian and dystopian characteristics found in three key modernist texts by Joyce, Zamyatin and Pessoa, the literary effects of which have been strongly influenced by the crisis of narrative self-representation and the allegorical demythification of totalitarian social and political experiments. Two distinct perspectives are deployed in order to achieve this: Paul Valéry’s dystopian cultural-philosophical reflections on the intellectual crisis of Western civilisation as presented in his 1919 essay “The Crisis of the Mind”; and Frank Kermode’s essay on the contradictory nature of modernism, “The Modern”, published in 1965–1966.

**Keywords:** Modernism; Crisis; Paul Valéry; James Joyce; Yevgeny Zamiatin; Fernando Pessoa.

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### **1. Introduction: Valéry’s “The Crisis of the Mind”**

In the Spring of 1919, *The Athenaeum*, London’s prestigious “review of literature, science and the fine arts”, at the time under the decidedly modernist directorship of John Middleton Murry, published a work by the French poet and essayist Paul Valéry entitled – provocatively and somewhat ominously – “The Crisis of the Mind”.<sup>1</sup> In his diagnosis of the collective mental anguish and suffering that was being experienced by a Europe that only months before had begun emerging from an internecine war of global proportions, Valéry noted the widespread presence of a cultural axiology in which dissimilar, poorly-defined and ambivalent strands of thought and behaviour were combined in a “disorderly” manner, obliging him to define the modern epoch as “the free coexistence, in all her cultivated minds, of the most dissimilar ideas [and] the most contradictory principles of life and knowledge”<sup>2</sup>. It was assumed that the amalgam of mutually contradictory ideas and principles that came to define the ideological modernity

of the first half of the 20th century would manifest itself in different types of aesthetic projects and would be deployed by diverse actors across a wide range of discrete artistic fields.<sup>3</sup>

For the purposes of our argument, it is worth dwelling for a moment on Valéry's thesis. It has an indisputably apocalyptic tone, a sombre message redolent of the imminent demise of a moribund order – conveying the “sense of an ending” to which Frank Kermode refers in the title of one of his most celebrated essays.<sup>4</sup> However, Valéry's title “The Crisis of the Mind” also evokes a submission to the vortex, an active yielding to the black hole of history, as yet another cycle ends and everything shrinks back to nothing in unashamed validation of the ever-repeating law of civilisational collapse.

Elam, Ninevah, Babylon were but beautiful vague names, and the total ruin of those worlds had as little significance for us as their very existence. But France, England, Russia ... these too would be beautiful names. Lusitania too, is a beautiful name. And we see now that the abyss of history is deep enough to hold us all.<sup>5</sup>

As an intellectual from one of the First World War's victorious nations – or, put in more millenarian terms, the triumphant coalition in the battle of Armageddon – it would have been surprising had Valéry not displayed some subliminal antagonism towards Germany; and yet he sees in the behaviour of the German people a clear historical example of what he considers the defining paradox of “the crisis of the mind” being experienced throughout Western

civilisation, namely the unprecedented and apparently irreversible interpenetration of contradictory axiological principles. If so many horrors of war could only be understood as being associated with the application of the abstract moral qualities of hard work, discipline and the rigorous, pursuit of the scientific spirit, the interrogation of these premises simply intensified Valéry's perplexed diagnosis that the era in which he lived was totally dominated by a paradox that “suddenly became factual, factual and brutally believed”<sup>6</sup>, and which evoked in him not only cogent scepticism, but also deep disappointment and insurmountable anguish.

So many horrors could not have been possible without so many virtues. Doubtless, much science was needed to kill so many, to waste so much property, annihilate so many cities in so short a time; but *moral qualities* in like number were also needed. Are Knowledge and Duty, then, suspect?<sup>7</sup>

“Hope is only [... our] mistrust of the clear foresight of [... our] mind”<sup>8</sup>, said Valéry, rejecting any contribution hope might make on the grounds that was a tool for the mystification of factual evidence and a means of casting suspicion on the capacity of humans to foresee with greater objectivity what the future may really hold. Sharing the same intellectual environment of disillusionment and trauma as a multitude of his peers across Europe – the War Poets, the “Lost Generation”, *la génération du feu* – who experienced technologically-assisted slaughter in no man's land among the trenches and the barbed wire, Valéry draws the gloomiest of

conclusions that flow from his pessimistic diagnosis of the mental state of Europe in 1919. For him, every domain of research, deduction or validation applicable to the human condition or to the value of human existence – be it science, religion, philosophy or art – had succumbed to the vortex of collective anguish: “even the sceptics, (...) lose their doubts, recover, and lose them again, no longer master[s] of the motions of their thought”<sup>9</sup>. It seemed to Valéry that more ominous than the military and economic crisis associated with the war, was the intellectual crisis of European civilisation, for which he could not devise any aesthetic, literary or philosophical remedy, nor foresee the germination of any potentially innovative or regenerative impulse. He saw only the amorphous disorder that had been caused by the outbreak of an ostentatious and ultimately futile form of encyclopaedism, whose apogee he calculated to have coincided exactly with the start of the First World War. In fact, in his essay, what Valéry gave voice to was our cowed perplexity when confronted by what, in cultural terms, was a seismic event of almost unimaginable proportions, which occurred at the turn of the century, a radical mutation of the ideological values typically associated with modernism as an aesthetic-cultural phenomenon<sup>10</sup>.

Since, as we know, one of the fundamental causes of this earthquake was, from Valéry’s perspective, rooted in the coexistence of dissimilar and contradictory ideas in the symbolic universe of the European intelligentsia, the psychosocial consequences would take the form of two opposing attitudes: one was to take refuge in the dense, labyrinthine memory of Western culture that opposed the unfettered

forward march of the technological innovations – not least of all in the field of weaponry – that heralded and facilitated a new barbarism; the other was to surrender all freedom of individual conscience with regard to the triumph of the ideology on which that progress was predicated. The first of these attitudes reflected a reaction to general disorder which sought to mitigate its most detrimental effects by promoting the values of a past that was apparently more coherent than the contemporary present. The second prefigured the triumph of irrationality – albeit masquerading as precisely the opposite – and the consequent annulment of individual autonomy in favour of the construction of a mass society, “the perfect and ultimate anthill”<sup>11</sup>.

The various landscapes, present and future, that were envisioned from the battlements of the castle of Elsinore by an anguished Hamlet, whom Valéry considered the personification of the European mind, constituted a dilemma both of whose horns inevitably spelled utter devastation: one symbolised the chaotic disorder of constantly revisiting the past, occasioned by pretentious exhibitionism or a yearning for intellectual consolation; the other represented the order provided by a future devoid of any individual freedom, in which all are alienated from themselves and from each other as an ant-hill society takes shape.

Weighed down by “multiple layers of knowledge and an accumulation of discoveries”<sup>12</sup> none of which has been conducive to a benign historical pathway, this Hamlet, in self-absorbed torment at seeing no resolution to the question of what he is becoming, of what he is to be, whose ghosts

consist of “all the subjects of our controversies”, and who “broods on the tedium of rehearsing the past and the folly of always trying to innovate”<sup>13</sup> finds himself caught helplessly between the Scylla of oppressive order and the Charybdis of total disorder. His position obliges him to reformulate Shakespeare’s iconic ontological question, albeit in a more prosaic and basic way, reflecting his anxiety with regard to the role of intellectuals in the post-war period, for he recognises that “the passage from war to peace [... is] darker, more dangerous than the passage from peace to war. ‘What about Me,’ he asks, ‘what is to become of Me, the European intellect? ...And what is peace?’”<sup>14</sup>. Valéry answers his own question as follows:

Peace is perhaps that state of affairs in which the natural hostility between human beings manifests itself in creation and not in destruction, as in war. Peace is a time of creative rivalry and the battle of production; but am I not tired of producing? Have I not exhausted my desire for radical experiment, indulged too much in cunning compounds? ... Should I not perhaps lay aside my hard duties and transcendent ambitions?<sup>15</sup>.

The density and diversity of issues and motifs Valéry considers in his essay appear to point the way to an answer to this dilemma, and it is his alter ego, his intellectual *id*, the Hamlet of European cultural consciousness, who provides it and, in doing so, allows new aesthetic forms to be cultivated as responses to the key elements of the paradox: on the one hand, “paleo-modernist” forms (to use Kermodé’s

term<sup>16</sup>) which to a large extent preserve and develop established traditions; on the other hand, “neo-modernist” forms that reject or radically distort them.

Thus the vectors of Valéry’s diagnosis of modernity and the mental crisis experienced in the first two decades of the 20th century can be summarised as follows: a recognition that a paradoxical state of consciousness predominates; a presentiment that an “anthill society” is in the process of being formed; and a continued aspiration towards a perpetual “Kantian” state of peace as a means of sublimating the human appetite for conflict that is engendered both by unfettered ambition and by a distaste for the weight of normative constraints on individual behaviour.

These are factors that, according to Auerbach, Trilling and Luckács<sup>17</sup>, show how humanism has been subverted by the cultural force of modernism, thereby contributing to the “dehumanization of art” identified by Ortega y Gasset.<sup>18</sup> However, these same factors also account for what we may term the “crisis of the subject”<sup>19</sup>, namely the erosion of the unambiguous ontological, individual and social stability that hitherto had been enjoyed. The depth of this crisis can be seen in the attention the literary aesthetics of modernism has paid to human consciousness (as in the so-called inward turn), whether through the direct recording of subjective experience (as in the stream of consciousness) or, paradoxically, via the elimination of any defined centre or narrative directing voice (as in the poetics of impersonality).

Leaving aside the controversial issue of the general features of modernist aesthetics, i.e., the sophisticated techniques used to achieve it, the radical innovations

that emerged from it in different arts, the time-line of its evolution, and the different national versions that can be discerned<sup>20</sup>, our purpose in the rest of our essay is to propose additional hermeneutic possibilities with regard to the “crisis of the European mind” assailing Europe in the aftermath of the First World War, drawing on three textual examples of authors from discrete literary cultures, one for each of the principal vectors in Valéry’s diagnosis: Joyce for the notion of paradox, Zamiatin for the concept of the “anthill society”, and Pessoa (through his heteronym Alberto Caeiro) for the aspiration to perpetual peace.

## 2. Paradox: Joyce’s *Ulysses*

Paradox is obviously not exclusive either to modern thought or modernist aesthetics. However, its adoption as a means of dealing with the complex challenge of inhabiting our world, with its reversible dualities and with its fatal and apparently conclusive, static and constituent dilemmas of the principle of reality, is recurrent among many significant works that emerged from this new way of representing the world, with Valéry’s 1919 essay figuring as one of the most iconic texts evoking the anguish and the chaos, and perhaps even portending the final death-knell of European culture.

In its ninth chapter, Joyce’s *Ulysses*, first published three years after “The Crisis of the Mind”, tells of situations and circumstances that seem to function as a fictional *scholium* to Valéry’s desolate characterization of the modern spirit, complete with references to the spread of contradictory juxtaposed ideas and principles that

validate his thesis that, in the first quarter of the 20th century, ideological disorder prevails. Conveniently, the action of this chapter occurs in a place where myriad paradoxes, antitheses, dissonances, registers, languages, styles, forms, and all manner of historical consciousnesses – intellectual, national and universal – are housed together: the National Library of Ireland in Dublin. According to the Gilbert version of Joyce’s own schema of the intricate narrative structure of *Ulysses*<sup>21</sup>, it is between two and three in the afternoon, on June 16th, 1904, when Stephen Dedalus, Joyce’s alter-ego, along with various representatives of Dublin’s intellectual elite, debates various specious questions relating to the genesis of characters such as Shakespeare’s Hamlet, based, according to Stephen, on the playwright’s own life. The insertion into the plot of the *Ulysses* narrative of Stephen’s anecdotal explanation of the origins of one of the great icons of western literary culture – and the very personification, according to Valéry, of the European intellect – that Stephen apparently has gleaned from Shakespeare’s biography, is an ironic exercise by a Joyce who is driven by his fascination for paradoxical thought. Just as Hamlet (or his father’s ghost) is a literary transfiguration of Shakespeare, so Stephen (the same main character as in Joyce’s *Stephen Hero* or in his *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*), whose literary ambition was to match Shakespeare’s aesthetic genius, is a fictional sublimation of Joyce. Notwithstanding the narcissism and self-irony of Joyce presenting himself as an Irish Hamlet and/or even an Irish Shakespeare<sup>22</sup>, paradox is the key to this episode, as symbolised by the irreconcilable choices faced by Ulysses when, in Homer’s *Odyssey*,

he is forced to navigate between the two inescapable perils of Scylla and Charybdis<sup>23</sup>.

The anti-hero Leopold Bloom provides a symbolic counterpoint to Joyce's Homeric character: the meanderings of the Irish Jew through early 20th century Dublin provide a reflection in microcosm of the Greek hero's voyages through the Eastern Mediterranean seas, albeit with a markedly paradoxical purpose, and burdened by an alterity that is quite distinct from that of mortal Ulysses amidst the gods and monsters. It would have been easy to miss the presence of Bloom/Ulysses altogether, for it is Stephen/Telemachus whom Joyce tasks with expounding the theory of the Shakespeare/Hamlet identity, and parodying the prince's philosophical musings on being or not being.

Among the coupled terms with opposite or merely different meanings – i.e., identity/literary (Shakespeare/Hamlet), religious/philosophical (Christ/Socrates), (mysticism/ scholasticism), topological (London/Stratford), generational (youth/maturity) – it is around the paradoxical pairing of the author and the literary creation (identity/literary) that the sense of paradox intensifies, as a direct result of Stephen's marriage of two seemingly contradictory theses, albeit at different points in the narrative. At first, Stephen openly defends the idea that biography is determinant in much of Shakespeare's work, dismissing other explanations provided, in particular, by the neo-platonic scholar George Russell, as portrayed by Joyce.

Corresponding, as it does, to a specific episode in the voyages of Ulysses, in which the terms of the paradox or, in this case, the horns of a dilemma, are specifically symbolised by a monster and a whirlpool that are equally voracious, if we were to focus

on only one of its terms, it could be said that the biographical thesis expresses an option on the part of Stephen/Telemachus to interpretatively "navigate" the complex genesis and nature of Shakespeare's works, and to abandon himself to the potential errors into which a deterministic hermeneutics might lead him with regard to the characters, facts and plots fictionalised by the Bard.

To this end, Stephen resorts to a surprisingly imaginative set of arguments: (a) that a significant part of Shakespeare's work, in particular the play *Hamlet*, was inspired by his private life, most specifically, in regard to the betrayal he suffered, first on the part of his wife, Anne Hathaway, (who is transfigured into the adulterous Queen Gertrude), and also into the mysterious creature evoked in the sonnets, whom Oscar Wilde speculated was the young actor Willie Hughes; (b) that there is no coincidence either in the homophony between Hamnet (Shakespeare's only son) and Hamlet, nor in the fact that both he and the prince died young; and (c) that the Platonic conceptions of literary creativity espoused by George Russell – "Art has to reveal to us ideas, formless spiritual ideas"<sup>24</sup> are implausible when compared to the empiricism of Aristotle's "Hold to the now, the here"<sup>25</sup>. However, Stephen's thesis that the ghost of Hamlet's father is the literary sublimation of the playwright's late father John Shakespeare, remembrance of whom inspired him to write a play about the Prince of Denmark, belies the previous thesis. However decisive the two ghostly figures, one historical, the other fictional, may have been to the creative origins and dramatic action of *Hamlet*, respectively, they are summoned up by Stephen to

defend the thesis that the act of physical and spiritual creation is an act of paternal and filial consubstantiality. In presenting this argument, Stephen vacillates between two hypothetical thoughts: firstly that the doctrine of Christian consubstantiality may be true – a notion Stephen’s provocative room-mate Buck Mulligan mocks – and secondly, that the created might share the act of creation with the creator. Stephen says: “Fatherhood, in the sense of conscious begetting, is unknown to man. It is a mystical estate, an apostolic succession, from only begetter to only begotten”<sup>26</sup> In this way, and in direct contradiction with his biographical thesis on *Hamlet’s* origins, Stephen inclines towards George Russell’s spiritual thesis on literary creativity. In denying his initial thesis, Stephen/Telemachus deploys the opposing pole of the paradox, that is, he opts for a metaphysical and speculative interpretation of Shakespeare’s work, and surrenders to the dizzying and disintegrative effects of the whirlpool. Stephen’s vacillation between diametrically opposed positions is further accentuated by the lack of conformity between the monophony, so to speak, of the ideas he ironically, parodically or prosaically communicates regarding the latent biographical nature of some of Shakespeare’s works, and the polyphonous expression, fashioned out of the subtle asides and literary allusions of his inner monologue.

As the debate and Stephen’s process of self-representation progress, he shows himself to be a sceptic who has, in fact, surrendered to the evidence of the mystery of being. However, echoing Valéry’s thesis that modernist sceptics come to doubt their own doubts, Stephen seems to personify the crisis of the European spirit

when he promptly answers in the negative Eglinton’s question, “Do you believe your own theory”?<sup>27</sup>

Earlier, Stephen had stated, in line with his theory of the consubstantiality of the world’s genesis, that – in both its “macrocosm” and “microcosm” – it was founded “upon the void. Upon incertitude, upon likelihood”<sup>28</sup>. Interestingly, Stephen’s thesis came to the public’s attention some five years before the formulation of the famous Heisenberg principle – which had scientifically demonstrated that a particle’s position and velocity cannot be measured simultaneously – became a foundation stone of quantum physics, thereby shaking a plethora of scientific certainties and unequivocal truths, and demonstrating for the first time the paradoxical nature of the subatomic world<sup>29</sup>. Once it had been confirmed that, at the subatomic level, matter could act like a wave or a particle, according to the conditions in which it finds itself and in which it is observed, a whole edifice of hitherto predictable and quantifiable scientific evidence associated with an ordered view of the universe was, if not demolished, then at least saw its logical and deterministic foundations begin to crumble<sup>30</sup>. Thus, more benign forms of the deadly Scylla – Charybdis paradox seem to be part of the revised laws of physics that had put an end to the certainties, coherence and rational order of the past.

When discussing the genesis of Shakespeare’s work, the ironic and parodical treatment Joyce gives to the universal paradox of being or not being, and his disruption of the conventional codes of discursive enunciation of the novelistic universe in which this debate takes place, are both examples of the modernist strategy

(in general) and of Joyce's aesthetics (in particular) when dealing with the crisis of ideological values. Moreover, they are demonstrative of a new type of writing that, according to T.S. Eliot, may even be the only one capable of sublimating or even overcoming the feeling of chaos and impending iconoclasm in the modern world<sup>31</sup>.

### 3. Ant-Hill Society in Zamiatin's Novel *We*

In 1919, Valéry had spoken of another apocalyptic symptom in the ideological, moral and literary values of modern Western civilization, that of the imminent construction of a so-called ant-hill society. Between 1920 and 1921, the Russian writer Evgeny Zamiatin wrote a prophetic, anti-totalitarian novel, entitled *We*. When the book was heavily criticised, he had it smuggled out of the country and in 1927 it was published in English in New York. Twenty-five years later, the original Russian text was issued, again in the USA, but it was only in 1988, after *glasnost*, that it could be legally acquired in the then Soviet Union.

In addition to providing a fictional illustration of the perverse effects of a totalitarian society, *We* is the first truly dystopian narrative of the 20th century, inaugurating what Moylan has designated, in the context of modern literary utopianism, the "dystopian turn"<sup>32</sup>. There would seem to be no room for paradox in this future city-state of glass towers erected behind a "Green Wall" that isolates the United State from the barbaric Mephi outside. Inside the Wall, the "Hour Tables" determine how time is spent, "Personal Hours" of relative privacy and liberty are enjoyed on a twice-daily basis, and the eugenicist "Maternal and Paternal

Norms" determine who may breed and who may not. Under the paternalistic tutelage of the revered benefactor, referred to by all as "The Well-Doer", order, symmetry and transparency rule, surveillance is absolute, denunciation expected, and punishment harsh. Citizens are even deprived of their names and designated only by a short combination of a letter and a number. The people rejoice that the "time of those Shakespeares and Dostoievskys"<sup>33</sup> is over, and joyously recall their schooldays, when they all read "that greatest of all monuments of ancient literature, *The Official Railroad Guide*"<sup>34</sup>. In this anthill society, "[a]t the very same hour millions, like one, we begin our work and, millions like one, we finish it", feeling "united in a single body with millions of hands"<sup>35</sup>. Poetry – which, like all artistic endeavours, must serve the greater good – accompanies the execution of "numbers" (as all citizens are called) who recklessly and corruptly have preferred individualistic "freedom of conscience" to making their contribution to the collective project of universal happiness.

D-503, the narrator and central character of *We*, is the designer of the *Integral*, an interplanetary vehicle that will spread the model of the "United State" to the entire universe. Unexpectedly, a "soul"<sup>36</sup> seemingly like a virus or cancer, insinuates itself into him, causing him to experience unexpected symptoms, such as the feelings of obsessive love for E-330, feelings that he, as a trained mathematician, cannot reduce to Euclidean axioms. The disease engendered by the "soul" that has infected him then erupts, occasioning first of all an inner division – "I was afraid to remain alone with myself, or to be more correct, with that new strange self, who by some curious coincidence bore



my number"<sup>37</sup>. Later, seeing his face in the mirror seemingly for the first time, the internal dissociation D-503 feels is the result of an unexpected surge of jealousy – a state of consciousness prohibited by the rules of the One State – against R, a fellow-citizen, over the beautiful and enigmatic D, the object of his uncontrolled passion:

Then I, the real I, suddenly saw in the mirror a broken, quivering line of brow [...] I, the real I, grasped my other wild, hairy, heavily breathing self forcibly. I, the real I, said to [...] R, "in the name of the Well-Doer, please forgive me [...] I don't know what is the matter with me"<sup>38</sup>.

Here we are reminded of the significant influence on the development of modernist poetics of Freud's thesis on the struggle within the human psyche between the primal, irrational *id*, the rational *ego*, and the ethical *super-ego*.<sup>39</sup> With inventive narrative precision, Zamiatin gives greater intensity to the irrational motives that lie behind the unravelling of D-503's hitherto alienated, repressed and ultra-controlled consciousness and, in so doing, helps the reader to understand why these developments are having such a disturbing effect on those immediately around him and, indeed, on the wider social order. Zamiatin interweaves two elements into the disintegration of D-503's psyche: firstly, the crisis of the very mathematics that hitherto had formed the uncontested cornerstone of the ideology and functioning of the United State – "My mathematics, the only firm and immovable island in my shaken life, this too, was torn from its anchor and was floating, whirling"<sup>40</sup>; secondly, he integrates into his

text the challenge mounted by the Mephi, those who live beyond the Wall, against the aseptic social order established under the Well-Doer's paternalistic tyranny – it was

as though a bomb had exploded in my head . . . open mouths, [birds'] wings, shouts, leaves, words, stones, all of these one after the other in a heap [...] They somehow had blasted and destroyed the Green Wall, and from behind it everything rushed in and splashed over our city which until then had been kept clean of that lower world<sup>41</sup>.

Zamiatin leaves the conclusion to his dystopia open, perfectly in harmony with the modernist sensibility that had cast doubt upon any unitary and definitive portrayal of the world. Despite the author's ironic hint that the totalitarian order and its anthill society might conceivably endure – "because", as D-503 says in the last entry he makes in his notebook, "reason must prevail"<sup>42</sup> – the United State now finds itself threatened by the population's growing imaginative powers, no longer suppressed by brain surgery, and stimulated by citizens' now-unregulated libidos and their recently-acquired knowledge of what lies beyond the Wall. The future of the United State is now at the mercy of risk and uncertainty, hitherto unimagined revolutionary changes that resound in the words of D-530's lover E-330 – functioning as a kind of avatar of the subversive eternal feminine – when she says, in response to D-530's naive expression of confidence in the revolution brought about by the United State: "And why then do you think there is a last revolution . . . There is no last revolution, their number is infinite . . ."<sup>43</sup>.

#### 4. Peace: Pessoa's Alberto Caeiro<sup>44</sup>

In a way, the least plausible hypothesis of all provides the only chance of our overcoming, not so much the open-endedness associated with infinity, but rather the dynamics of its cyclical repetition, the suspension of the Nietzschean assumption of eternal return. To achieve this would involve taking paradox on board without the friction normally associated with it, and accepting the possibility – as Valéry suggests at the end of his essay – of living and creatively representing ourselves, axiologically and aesthetically, in the modern post First World War world. Such an aspiration to permanent peace, by overcoming the endless constraints and boundless ambitions that have always prevented it, attains something close to the literary register, albeit more extensive and permanent, that we associate with those unexpected and almost revelatory occurrences and situations Joyce refers to as “epiphanies”.

In the process of constructing peace, however, it is essential to suspend any thinking that is judgmental or which prevents humans being free of the vicious and alienating use of abstract or instrumentalist reason – the type that provided the mathematician-engineer D-530 with the rationale for developing the space vehicle *Integral*, not only as a symbol of the power and prestige of the United State, but also as a means of exporting its social model off-world<sup>45</sup>.

One of the most radical ways of dealing with paradox and of hollowing out the metaphysical concept of one irreducible substantive unity of being, so perversely used to support the anomalous notion that only one unopposed system of thought

exists, is perhaps to learn from the poetics of one of Fernando Pessoa's literary heteronyms. Alberto Caeiro – designated the Master in Pessoa's own multi-personality literary universe – argued that *not* thinking could be considered another way of thinking – “I think about this not as someone who thinks, but as someone who doesn't think”, he says<sup>46</sup> – a way of thinking in which our consciousness of our own consciousness predominates, stripped bare of ideas and values because, as Caeiro concludes, “Being aware does not force me to have theories about things: / It only forces me to be conscious”<sup>47</sup>.

In the fragmentary *Notas para a Recordação do meu Mestre Caeiro*, [*Notes for a Memoire on my Master Caeiro*] written between 1930 and 1931, two of Pessoa's homonyms, Álvaro de Campos and Alberto Caeiro converse with Pessoa himself under the silent and watchful eye of António Mora. “Everyone from the group was together there in Lisbon and, by chance, the conversation came around to the concept of reality”<sup>48</sup>. To Pessoa's question “What is behind reality?”, Caeiro replies “There is nothing. Nor is there anything behind size, and there isn't anything behind weight, either”<sup>49</sup>. Here, Caeiro dismisses the essentialness of phenomena and their hidden inner mystery, asking “The mystery of things, where is it? / Where is what will not appear? / Not even to show us that it's a mystery?”<sup>50</sup>. He also feels sympathetic towards the spontaneous reasonless activity of the natural world: “Whenever I look at things and think about what men think of them / I laugh like a brook as it washes a stone”<sup>51</sup>. We also find here a hollowing out of symbolic meaning, and a dismantling of ideas that are secondary to the flow

of existence: "For the only hidden meaning that things have, is that they have no meaning. [...] // Yes, that's what my senses have learned unaided: / Things don't have meaning: what they have is existence. / The only hidden meaning of things is things"<sup>52</sup>.

Interestingly, while none of these three poetic statements would sound out of place on the lips of a Zen master, they also seem to prefigure a very original existential and aesthetic response to the Hamlet of modern European cultural consciousness, evoked by Valéry. Here, in contrast to Joyce's and Zamiatin's narrative strategies to deal with the crisis of the European spirit, i.e. via the paradoxical reordering of chaos and by using antiphrasis to denounce distended, unidimensional rationality, respectively, the possibility of a poetics of peace-making opens up, in which the very limits of reality might be attained by "learning to unlearn"<sup>53</sup>, promoting not a regression but a reintegration, driven not only by a recognition of and gratitude for life in the fullest senses – "Calmly, without complaint, like someone who simply accepts, / and finds joy in the fact of accepting / in the fact, sublimely scientific and so difficult to accept what is inevitably natural"<sup>54</sup> – but also by the serene wish to share what holds the human way of life together – "Blessed be that same sun of other lands / that makes everyone my brethren / because all of them, at some moment in the day, look

at it as I do, / and, in that pure moment, / cleansed and stirred / they return imperfectly / to their true and primitive state"<sup>55</sup>.

### 5. Concluding Thoughts on Utopian Voices from Outside the Genre

With the exception of the resounding name of Eugene Zamiatin, those of Valéry, Joyce and Pessoa would not be considered part of the canon in the utopian genre. Nevertheless, in their particular representations and reflections on the world, these significant authorial voices of 20th century European literary culture, each using their own thematic, rhetorical and discursive modalities, manage to interrogate, problematise, and deconstruct hitherto dominant systems of thought and ideological configurations that have been exposed as lacking critical value and incapacity to adequately scrutinise the reality of human existence. In our reading, what these voices, whether their words be spoken by an essayist, novelist or poet, are stimulated by the very same principle of idealisation that is characteristic of utopian thought – understood, of course, not as some sort of deviant worldview or tool of mystification, but as an indispensable intellectual resource for a better understanding of our history, the real world we currently inhabit, and a more hopeful future.

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## NOTES

1. Paul Valéry, *The crisis of the mind*, Letter 1 (<http://www.historyguide.org/europe/valery.html>). The French version of the essay was published in August 1919 in the *Nouvelle Revue Française* as “La crise de l’esprit” (<http://www.ellopos.net/politics/valery-crise-esprit>) and included in the *Œuvres de Paul Valéry*. Tome IV, *Variété: premier volume*, Éditions de la N.R.F (1934, p. 13-29) ([https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Vari%C3%A9t%C3%A9/La\\_Crise\\_de\\_l%E2%80%99esprit](https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Vari%C3%A9t%C3%A9/La_Crise_de_l%E2%80%99esprit)), and in Paul Valéry’s complete works (Gallimard, ‘Collection La Pléiade’), edited by Jean Hytier. All quotes from Valéry’s essay are taken from [www.historyguide.org/europe/valery.html](http://www.historyguide.org/europe/valery.html) a valuable electronic source conceived “in the spirit of Socratic wisdom and knowledge”, and containing lectures on Modern European Intellectual History given at Florida Atlantic University and Meredith College (USA) by Prof. Steven Kreis.
2. *Ibidem*.
3. Strictly speaking, “modern epoch” and “modernism” cannot be considered synonyms, but Valéry uses the adjective as a hypernym, a catch-all term to embrace the entire intellectual, ideological, cultural and artistic environment of his day.
4. Frank Kermode, *The Sense of An Ending. Studies in the Theory of Fiction (with a new epilogue)*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000. Kermode’s core thesis was that the apocalypse was not only the source of much literary fiction, but also of our notions of historical transition and crisis.
5. Paul Valéry, *The crisis of the mind*, Letter 1.
6. *Ibidem*.
7. *Ibidem*.
8. *Ibidem*.
9. *Ibidem*.
10. In this regard, see “The Name and Nature of Modernism”, in *Modernism. A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930* (1991), ed. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, London, Penguin Books, 1991, p. 36-40, and “Modernist canons”, in Ástráður Eysteinnsson, *The Concept of Modernism*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1992, p. 83-89.
11. Paul Valéry, *The crisis of the mind*, Letter 1.
12. *Ibidem*.
13. *Ibidem*.
14. *Ibidem*.
15. *Ibidem*.
16. Frank Kermode, “The Modern”, in *Modern Essays*, London, Collins, Fontana, 1970, p. 46. According to Kermode, the distinction between paleo-modernism and neo-modernism lies in the fact that tradition and/or the cult of form is still emphasised in the former, while the latter deliberately rids itself of such “baggage”. For Kermode “whereas such a poem as *The Waste Land* draws upon a tradition which imposes the necessity of form [...] new modernism prefers and professes to do without the tradition and the illusion”, *op. cit.*, p. 50. However, this differentiation is only relative, for there continues to exist a shared purpose, and therefore a “family resemblance” between the modernisms. “‘Indifference’ and the abrogation of ‘responsibility’ are the wilder cousins of the more literary ‘impersonality’ and ‘objectivity’”. The paleo-modernist conspiracy which made a cult of occult forms is not unrelated to the extremist denial that there are any. These are the self-reconciling opposites of modernism” *op. cit.*, p. 5.
17. As Eysteinnsson informs us, in the final chapter of *Mimesis. The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, Erich Auerbach sees Virginia Woolf’s novel *To the Lighthouse* as breaking with the canons of narrative representation, indicative of a vision of the world devoid of cultural unity and marked by the confusion that reigns at the end of an era. Eysteinnsson, *op. cit.*, p. 24-30. Lionel Trilling identifies the ‘modern’ in modern literature as displaying signs of irrationality. Lionel Trilling, “On the Modern Element in Modern Literature”, Stanley Burnshaw (ed.), *Varieties of Literary Experience*,

- New York, New York University Press, 1962, p. 407-433. Georg Lukács states that modernist writing is essentially anti-social, absurdist and devoid of perspective. See George Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, Trans. John and Necke Mander, London, Merlin Press, 1969, p. 20.
18. José Ortega y Gasset, *A desumanização da arte*, Translated by Manuela Agostinho & Teresa Salgado Canhão, pref. Maria Filomena Molder, Lisboa, Veja, 1996. The author argues that for modernist painters, or “new artists” as he calls them, “aesthetic pleasure emanates from the triumph over the humane”, which requires that victory be secured in all cases, and the strangled body displayed”, *op. cit.*, p. 84, our translation. In addition to the chapter (entitled “The dehumanization of art begins”) from which this quote comes, see also the chapter devoted to “The dehumanization of art continues”, *op. cit.*, p. 90-98.
  19. On the crisis of the subject, see the various excerpts (from Schlegel, Hegel, Marx, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Yeats) in the chapter “The Divided Self”, in Richard Ellmann & Charles Feidelson Jr. (eds.), *The Modern Tradition*, 1965, p. 738-765. See also “The Crisis of the Subject”, in Eysteinnsson, *op. cit.*, p. 26-30, and “The Modernist Self”, in Christopher Butler, *Early Modernism. Literature, Music and Painting in Europe 1900-1916*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1994. p. 89-131.
  20. See, for example, David Lodge, *Working with Structuralism: Essays and Reviews on 19th and 20th Century Literature*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981. The inventory provided by Lodge emphasizes innovations such as: “formal experiment, dislocation of conventional syntax, radical breaches of decorum, disturbance of chronology and spatial order, ambiguity, polysemy, obscurity, mythopoetic allusion, primitivism, irrationalism, structuring by symbol and motif rather than by narrative or argumentative logic, and so on”, *op. cit.*, p. 71.
  21. Stuart Gilbert, *James Joyce’s “Ulysses”: A Study*. New York/London, Alfred A. Knopf/Faber & Faber, 1931, p.30.
  22. In the debate, the fictionalised essayist, critic and librarian John Eglinton (real name William Kirkpatrick Magee) dismisses Stephen’s claim, affirming that there are no contenders for Shakespeare’s crown: “Our young Irish bards [...] have yet to generate a figure that the world will place side by side with the Saxon Shakespeare.” James Joyce, *Ulysses*, Jeri Johnson (ed.), Oxford, Oxford University Press, p. 177.
  23. Homer, *The Odyssey*, translated into English by Peter Green, Oakland CA, USA, University of California Press, 2019. Scylla was a monster who dwelled on the rocks overlooking a narrow strait, in whose waters, not an arrow’s flight away, there was a violent whirlpool, Charybdis. Those who sailed too close to shore, risked losing six of their mariners to the monster, whom Homer describes as having six long necks each bearing a head-full of savage teeth. Those who sailed too far off-shore risked losing the entire crew to “the whirlpool Charybdis, that thrice daily sucks in the water, and thrice spews it out again”, *op. cit.*, p. 191 and 202.
  24. James Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 177.
  25. *Ibidem*, p. 178.
  26. *Ibidem* p. 199.
  27. *Ibidem* p. 205.
  28. *Ibidem* p. 199.
  29. *The Faber Book of Science*, John Carey (ed.), London, Faber & Faber, 1995. Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle is summarized thus: “The development of the quantum theory of matter at the beginning of the twentieth century drastically altered conventional scientific wisdom. The conviction that the world was understandable had been science’s most important gift to civilization. It had redeemed mankind from centuries of superstition. The new physics destroyed this cherished certainty. It found that the subatomic world was random and ultimately unintelligible. Electrons and other subatomic particles do not move along predictable paths, and they behave, incomprehensibly, like waves as well as particles”, *op. cit.*, p. 277.
  30. Umberto Eco, *Obra Aberta. Formas e Indeterminação nas Poéticas Contemporâneas*, edited and translated into Portuguese by Sebastião Uchoa Leite, Celso Lafer & Haroldo Campos, São Paulo, Editora Perspectiva, 1976. Eco’s conclusion in this regard is that “the principle of indetermination and the

quantum methodology [...] only inform us about a certain way of *describing* some aspects of the world. However, [...] they *do*] tell us that some values we had hitherto believed to be absolute, and with validity as metaphysical structures by which to view the world (such as causality and the law of the excluded middle) have the same conventional value as the new methodological principles adopted. [...] [I]n a world where the discontinuity of phenomena has plunged into crisis the notion that everything has a unitary and definitive image, this would suggest a [new] way in which to see what is lived”, *op. cit.*, p. 158, our translation.

31. T.S. Eliot, “American Literature and the American Language”, in *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 74, No. 1, Winter, p. 1-20, 1966. Eliot concludes that “A new kind of writing appears, to be greeted at first with disdain and derision: we hear that tradition has been flouted, and that chaos has to come. After a time, it appears that the new way of writing is not destructive but re-creative. It is not that we have repudiated the past, as the obstinate enemies – and also the stupidest supporters – of any new movement like to believe; but that we have enlarged our conception of the past; and that in the light of what is new we see the past in a new pattern”, in Kermode, *op. cit.*, p. 64.
32. Tom Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky. Science Fiction and Utopia*, London, Routledge, 2000, p. 147-158. The similarity with Joyce’s “inward turn” is superficial, however: the shift in speculative fiction from a utopian to a dystopian gaze constitutes not a refocusing from the outside environment to the inner self, but a move from speculating about how the perfect society might be both achieved and organised, to one in which forms of authoritarian oppression and modes of individual and collective resistance become the principal object of the author’s attention.
33. Eugene Zamiatin, *We*, translated into English by Gregory Zilboorg, New York. Dutton, 1924. ([mises.org/books/we\\_zamiatin.pdf](http://mises.org/books/we_zamiatin.pdf)).
34. *Ibidem*, p.12.
35. *Ibidem*, p. 13.
36. *Ibidem* p. 181.
37. *Ibidem*, p. 39.
38. *Ibidem*, p. 60-61.
39. Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of dreams*, translated into English by A. A. Brill, New York/London, MacMillan, 1913. Freud’s thesis concerning the struggle within the human psyche between the primal *id*, the rational *ego*, and the ethical *super-ego* had a significant influence on the development of modernist poetics. For the impact of Freud’s works on our understanding of the modernist self, see Christopher Butler’s *Early Modernism*, *op. cit.*, p. 92-96.
40. *Ibidem*, p. 96.
41. *Ibidem*, p. 131.
42. *Ibidem*, p. 218.
43. *Ibidem*, p. 162.
44. All translations from Pessoa, de Campos and Caeiro, are ours.
45. The United States’ ultimate aim, as officially announced at the beginning of Zamiatin’s narrative (Record 1 – An Announcement) was to “subjugate to the grateful yoke of reason the unknown beings who live on other planets, and who are perhaps still in the primitive state of freedom. If they will not understand that we are bringing them a mathematically faultless happiness, our duty will be to force them to be happy. But before we take up arms, we shall try the power of words” (Zamiatin, *op. cit.*). This fictional extra-terrestrial expansionism reflects the real-world efforts of mainstream 19<sup>th</sup> century Christianity to contend with new scientific discoveries, notably in astronomy; the Vatican ended up defending a kind of Catholic cosmic imperialism in which the elect of planet Earth would legitimately exercise dominion over any alien beings that one day might be encountered. See e.g. Louis Lescœur, *La vie future – Conférences de l’Oratoire par le R. P. Lescœur*, Paris, J. Albabel, 1872, “Septième conférence – Le lieu de l’immortalité”, p. 209-241.
46. Fernando Pessoa, “Notas para a Recordação do meu Mestre Caeiro por Álvaro de Campos”, in *Alberto Caeiro: Poemas Completas*, edited by Teresa Sobral Cunha, Lisbon, Presença, 1994, p. 86 (our translation).

47. *Ibidem*, p. 121.
48. *Ibidem*, p. 168.
49. *Ibidem*, p. 169.
50. *Ibidem*, p. 89.
51. *Ibidem*, p. 89.
52. *Ibidem*, p. 89.
53. *Ibidem*, p. 149.
54. *Ibidem*, p. 139.
55. *Ibidem*, p. 139. For an alternative reading, both in terms of its assumptions and its foundations, to the one we have proposed on the poetics of peace-making in Caeiro's work, see the essay by Luís Oliveira e Silva, "O conceptualismo embaçado: a misologia filológica de Alberto Caeiro" ["Concealed Conceptualism: The Philological Misology of Alberto Caeiro"] in Alda Correia, Gabriela Fragoso, Fernando Ribeiro, Manuel Canaveira (eds.), *A Arte da Cultura. Homenagem a Yvette Centeno*, Lisboa, Colibri, 2011, p. 611-631.