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The Hidden Greek Odes in “Um poeta lírico” (1880)

Eça de Queiroz’s Self-reflexive Fiction about Migration and Writing

Abstract: Concentrating on the correlation between Eça de Queiroz as a privileged migrant in consular services and his crisis in literary creativity, the present study aims to define the poetological meaning of the hidden multilingualism in the short story “Um poeta lírico” (1880). This interpretation presupposes an approach focused on creative reading and translating as communicating vessels, exemplified by the novel *A Relíquia* (1887), and on the writer’s awareness of Portugal’s subalternity towards French and English culture. “Um poeta lírico” is about a Greek immigrant in London who in public is confined to the English speech of a waiter, hiding his sublime identity as a poet. This is a parodic mirror of Eça de Queiroz’s own dilemma. Living abroad as a consul, he cannot unfold his identity as a Portuguese writer. Significantly, both are enthusiastic readers of Tennyson’s Arthurian poems in antiquated English that inspires a rewriting in their own national languages.

Keywords: Multilingualism, Portuguese Literature, Late 19th Century, Alfred Tennyson

1 Introduction

In Portuguese literary history José Maria Eça de Queiroz¹ (1845–1900) appears as the major Realist novelist, akin to Gustave Flaubert and Theodor Fontane in other national literatures. The comparison to these two authors is elucidatory, as both surpassed a literary practice circumscribed by the Realist paradigm.

¹ The historic writing of the family name “Eça de Queiroz” is maintained throughout this article, contrary to its modernization in “Eça de Queirós”. Bibliographic references are homogenized accordingly. I express my gratitude to Svera Dantas for her critical reading and stylistic revision.

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This is also the case with Eça de Queiroz.² Rather than limiting the scope to his most praised novels published between 1875 and 1888, it is worth analyzing his minor novels and narratives. In dialogue with essays and letters, they reveal a self-reflexivity that challenges traditional views on the evolution of his *écriture* from its beginnings in 1865 until his premature death at the age of 55. This alternative approach (Grossgesesse 1995) transcends the high-valued image of Eça de Queiroz as a novelist in the frame of European Realism and partly Naturalism by concentrating on the correlation between the author's crisis in literary creativity and his life as a privileged migrant in consular services in Newcastle (1874–79) and Bristol, until becoming consul-general in Paris in 1888.

2 Eça de Queiroz as a writer and a translator: communicating vessels

In the more traditional perspective, his absence from Portugal excuses his failure to realize a planned and often announced series of novels called *Cenas da Vida Portuguesa*. This ambitious project inspired by Balzac and Zola was meant to offer a fictionalized panorama of different aspects of Portuguese society. Eça de Queiroz expressed this view of failure in a letter to his friend Ramalho Ortigão (April 8, 1878), in which he bitterly jokes about his inaptitude to execute this project, as it would have been equally impossible for both French writers if living abroad: “Balzac [...] could not have written the *Human Comedy* in Manchester, and Zola could not have produced a line from *Rougon* in Cardiff: I cannot paint Portugal in Newcastle.”³ In the same letter, he also complains about a lack of conversation, essential to cultural and literary life and to a writing practice which – in the case of Eça de Queiroz as a typical dandy-writer (Grossgesesse 1991: 15–16) – not only is grounded on the observation of social reality but also stems from witty conversation in Lisbon upper class society. He dramatizes his situation in Newcastle as a kind of “exile”, being deprived of “all the conditions for intellectual excitement”, exclaiming: “It has now been one year since I last

² Without going into detail on the simultaneous reception of French Realism and Naturalism in Portugal.

³ “Balzac [...] não poderia escrever a *Comédia Humana* em Manchester, e Zola não lograria fazer uma linha dos *Rougon* em Cardife: eu não posso pintar Portugal em Newcastle” (Queiroz 2000, IV: 123). All quotations translated into English are mine.

conversed!”⁴ Another letter he wrote seven years later in Bristol (May 24, 1885) confirms the experience of alienation, as if watching “life from outside”⁵: “tudo [...] me é desagradável desde a sua estreita maneira de pensar até ao seu indecente modo de cozer os legumes” [Everything about this society is disagreeable to me – from its limited way of thinking to its indecent manner of cooking vegetables] (Queiroz 2000, IV: 291).

During this exact period (1878–85), while Eça de Queiroz was struggling to continue *Cenas da Vida Portuguesa*, with some of its volumes almost finished others roughly sketched out, he produced smaller novels and narratives which have traditionally received less attention since they deviate from the Realist / Naturalist paradigm. They have been understood (1) as a kind of minor filler to satisfy his editor’s demands and to stay present in the Portuguese cultural scene or (2) as an increasingly divergent practice that anticipates the so-called *late* or *ultimate* Eça de Queiroz situated in the eclectic *Fin de Siècle*.

Contrary to these views, which are more or less conditioned by the literary canon, this study will go further in the alternative approach by analyzing the short story “Um poeta lírico”, published in 1880, as self-reflexive fiction about migration and writing. Linked to an earlier attempt to rewrite Alfred Tennyson’s Arthurian poems in Portuguese prose, it has a similar genesis to other shorter narratives created by Eça in the wake of foreign reading experiences, mostly English and French literature. Published in the same year as “Um poeta lírico”, the novella *O Mandarim* enacts the thought experiment of killing a Chinese Mandarin which became popular, mainly through Balzac’s *Le père Goriot* (1835). As this case has already been analyzed in depth,⁶ the genesis and the discursive organization of one of his later novels, *A Relíquia* (1887), deserves a closer look in order to comprehend “Um poeta lírico” within a practice of creative reading and translating as communicative vessels.

In an essay sent from Bristol to the Brazilian *Gazeta de Notícias* (August 24, 1881), Eça de Queiroz ironically comments on Benjamin Disraeli’s dubious qualities as a writer and reports mainly on his novel *Tancred; or the New Crusade* (1847). A few years later, the same novel acts as catalyst for inventing a kind of

⁴ “[...] neste degredo faltam-me todas as condições da excitação intelectual. *Há um ano que não converso!*” (author’s emphasis; Queiroz 2000, IV: 123).

⁵ From a letter sent to his friend Bernardo, Conde de Arnoso: “Se vier a Hyde-Park ou aos Campos Elíseos, vê só a *Vida por fora*, no seus contornos exteriores” [If you come to Hyde-Park or the Champs Elysees, you only see *Life from the outside*, in its outer contours] (author’s emphasis; Queiroz 2000, IV: 291)

⁶ See Coimbra Martins (1967) who also mentions Auguste Vitu’s story *Le mandarin* (1848) and the play *As-tu tué le mandarin?* (1855) by Albert Monnier and Edouard Martin.

mock crusade to Palestine: while young Lord Montacute, who merges dandyism with Jewishness, returns from Jerusalem “to Regent Street as a Messiah and regenerator of societies”⁷, the novel *A Relíquia* presents the sly bachelor Teodorico Raposo indulging in debauchery and eager to inherit the fortune of his bigoted aunt by offering her a relic recovered from the Holy Land. His travel companion, the German archaeologist Topsius, shows him how to counterfeit a relic by manipulating scientific and religious “truths”. This parodies not only *La Vie de Jésus* (1863) by Ernest Renan but also the problem of dilettantism in European civilization. Without going into further detail, Teodorico – imaging himself being treated as a colleague by Renan (Queiroz 2021: 311) – defends a “shameless heroism of affirmation”, which “through universal illusion creates Sciences and Religions”.⁸ In *Essais de Psychologie Contemporaine* (1883), Paul Bourget identifies Renan’s scepticism as one of the causes for the “vacillation de la volonté” (Bourget 1883: 199).⁹

As narrator, Teodorico announces his own story as a “lucid and strong lesson [...] in this century, so consumed by the uncertainties of intelligence”¹⁰ and a necessary rebuttal of what Professor Topsius says about him in the travel report he published in Leipzig with the “fine and profound title *Jerusalém Passeada e Comentada*”.¹¹ All direct quotations from this book appear in Portuguese (Queiroz 2021: 77) and the reader of *A Relíquia* is never informed about Teodorico’s multilingual proficiency, nor does s/he get to know in which language(s) the companions speak on their journey to the Holy Land.

7 “[...] e tendo partido de London como simples Lord, possa regressar a Regent-Street, como Messias e regenerador de sociedades!” (Queiroz 2000, III: 1126). In 1905, this text is included in a volume titled *Cartas de Inglaterra*, reedited until present times.

8 “descarado heroísmo de afirmar que, [...], cria, através da universal ilusão, Ciências e Religiões” (Queiroz 2021: 312).

9 “This is the first negative reference to Renan’s dilettantism, which Bourget contrasts with the energy, rigor and serious engagement of the past” (Hibbitt 2006: 91). In a second volume, *Nouveaux essais de psychologie contemporaine* (1885), dilettantism is presented as an effect of the uncertainties of modern existence, leading to pessimism and melancholy, to the so-called *maladie de la volonté*. This is defined by Richard Hibbitt as “Bourget’s Revised Conception of Dilettantism” (Hibbitt 2006: 94–99).

10 “uma lição lúcida e forte [...] neste século, tão consumido pelas incertezas da Inteligência” (Queiroz 2021: 75).

11 “[...], com este título fino e profundo – *Jerusalém Passeada e Comentada*” (Queiroz 2021: 77).

Through these brief indications it becomes evident that both the making and the fiction of *A Relíquia* involve switching between languages.¹² Distinguishing the receptive multilingualism from the fictional, the latter is hidden. No reference is made to the translational effort, as if rectifying a (fictive) German travel report through a Portuguese counterstatement were a simple monolingual procedure. As such, not even the original title is mentioned.¹³ Nonetheless, Teodorico begs Topsius to publish an amended second edition of his work “to disclose [the truth] to scientific Germany and sentimental Germany as frankly as I have revealed it to my citizens on these pages [...].”¹⁴ A similar tension between hidden and explicit multilingualism can be observed in the short story “Um poeta lírico”, assuming a specific functionality, as we will see. This goes in the direction of Alexander Coleman’s groundbreaking study: “Eça used his readings in English literature after 1880 to embark on a new way of thinking about the nature of literature. *The Mandarin* and *The Relic* are a literary *volte face*, [...]” (Coleman 1980: 149).

Coleman’s study has not inspired an integrative approach to literary creativity and translation which is, on the whole, disregarded in the historiography of 19th century Portuguese literature. Its “monolingual habitus”, to apply Gogolin’s term (Gogolin 2021: 300), constructs the irrelevance of multilingualism for national literature. The defence against cultural and linguistic subalternity does not go beyond the discussion that rouse in the late 19th century.

As a student at Coimbra University Eça de Queiroz was familiar with reading contemporary French literature – from Victor Hugo and Gustave Flaubert up to Charles Baudelaire – in the original language. To a lesser extent, this also applies to English literature. Translation became an everyday practice for him at the age of 21 as editor-in-chief of the province newspaper *Distrito de Évora* (1866). This refers not only to the incoming press agency news from Paris and London but also to some chapters of Hippolyte Taine’s popular *Voyage en Italie* (1864), published in *feuilleton*. At the same time, he sent a translation of Joseph Bouchardy’s play *Philidor* to the Lisbon National Theatre D. Maria II, although it

¹² Teodorico’s dream in Palestine of witnessing Jesus Christ is based on *Les Mémoires de Judas* (1867) by Ferdinando Petrucelli della Gattina.

¹³ The comparison with *Sartor Resartus* (1833–34) by Thomas Carlyle can be elucidatory in contrast: the editor, “a young enthusiastic Englishman,” explicitly refers to his partial translation of the work *Die Kleider, ihr Werden und Wirken*, written by Prof. Diogenes Teufelsdrökh and published by the editing house “Stillschweigen & Co.” na cidade de “Weißnichtwo”. Carlyle’s book was a creative reading experience for Eça de Queiroz (see Grossegesse 2000).

¹⁴ “[...] divulgue [...] à Alemanha científica e à Alemanha sentimental (...) tão francamente como eu o revelo aos meus cidadãos nestas páginas” (Queiroz 2021: 78).

was never performed on stage (see Bishop-Sanchez 2014). Once again, Alexander Coleman is one of the first and the few to highlight the relevance of “these brilliantly executed translations”, not being difficult “to imagine the young translator and future novelist’s response to Taine’s adept sketches, [...]” (Coleman 1980: 25).

In 1889, after already being recognized as a successful novelist, Eça de Queiroz wrote a slightly reduced and reshaped Portuguese version of Henry Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines* (1885), which first appeared in *Revista de Portugal* and afterwards in book form.¹⁵ Until recently, it remained unclear whether he in fact made the translation since the author himself declared that he revised a previous one. This version was never found, nor was a potential translator among his contacts (França 2000: 9). Probably, Eça de Queiroz himself did not want to appear as a translator. Nonetheless, his continuous translating practice manifests itself in his fiction, essays, and letters.

A cosmopolitan writing style in literary and non-literary texts was quite common among the European aristocracy and urban bourgeoisie throughout the 19th century. In the case of Eça de Queiroz, this is not limited to lexical borrowings mainly from French and English. Purists censured his decadent “afrancesado” Portuguese in morphemes and syntax, which turned out to be the author’s signature style. Frequently, Eça de Queiroz ridiculed contemporary Portuguese culture for being imported from France and – badly – translated, applying this to his own practice and work, for instance in a letter (May 10, 1884)¹⁶ to his friend Oliveira Martins, a renowned historian, politician, and social scientist:

A nossa arte e a nossa literatura vêm-nos feita de França, pelo paquete, e custa-nos caríssimo com os direitos de alfândega. Eu mesmo não mereço ser excetuado da legião melancólica e servil dos imitadores. Os meus romances no fundo são franceses, como eu sou em quase tudo um francês – exceto num certo fundo sincero de tristeza lírica, [...] [Our art and our literature come to us from France, by ship and with high customs duties. I myself do not deserve to be excluded from the melancholic and servile legion of imitators. My novels are basically French, as I am in almost everything a Frenchman – except for a certain sincere background of lyrical sadness, [...]] (Queiroz 2000, IV: 235–236).

¹⁵ It appeared first in the journal from October 1889 to June 1890; book titled *As Minas de Salomão*, first edition: Livraria Chardron, Casa Editora Lugar & Genelioux, Successores, 1891.

¹⁶ This letter was written in Angers, where the author lived every year for some months in the company of an unknown woman from 1879 to 1884.

Portugal’s cultural subalternity reappears as a topic in chapter IV of the novel *Os Maias* (1888) with a similar wording¹⁷ and also in an essay intitled *O Francismo* [The Frenchism], probably written in 1887 but only posthumously published. It opens retrospectively with

Há já longos anos que eu lancei esta fórmula: – Portugal é um país traduzido do francês em vernáculo. [...] E de novo a lancei assim aperfeiçoado: Portugal é um país traduzido do francês em calão

[It has been a long time since I launched this formula: – *Portugal is a country translated from French into vernacular* [...] And again I launched it thus perfected: *Portugal is a country translated from French into slang*] (author’s emphasis; Queiroz 2000, III: 2107).

Hence, this subalternity is also determined at the linguistic level within the European context. This consciousness has to be linked to the author’s crisis in literary creativity and his migrant, albeit privileged, status in consular services. In the same letter to Oliveira Martins (May 10, 1884), he confesses to suffering from a “crisis of stupidity and intellectual fog” and mutters about limiting his diminished creativity to “children’s books and legends of saints”.¹⁸ Six years before, he had already considered abandoning Realist writing and indulging instead in “purely fantastic and humorous literature”.¹⁹ This thought appears precisely in the letter mentioned at the beginning (April 8, 1878), in which the author complains about a lack of conversation, dramatizing his situation in Newcastle as a kind of “exile” (Queiroz 2000, IV: 123).

¹⁷ João da Ega’s speech within a conversation scene: “Aqui importa-se tudo. Leis, ideias, filosofias, teorias, assuntos, estéticas, ciências, estilo, indústrias, modas, maneiras, pilhérias, tudo nos vem em caixotes pelo paquete. A civilização custa-nos caríssima com os direitos de Alfândega: e é em segunda mão, não foi feita para nós, fica-nos curta nas mangas...” [Everything is imported here. Laws, ideas, philosophies, theories, subjects, aesthetics, science, style, industries, fashions, manners, jokes, everything comes in boxes by the liner. Civilization is extremely expensive for us with customs duties: and it’s second-hand, not made for us, it’s short on our sleeves...] (Queiroz 2017: 155).

¹⁸ Quotations from Queiroz (2000b, IV: 235; 236): “crise de estupidez e névoa intelectual”; “[...] e tenho a ideia de me limitar a escrever contos para crianças e vidas dos grandes Santos.”

¹⁹ “[...]; ou tenho de me entregar à literatura puramente fantástica e humorística.” (Queiroz 2000, IV: 123)

3 Exposed and hidden languages in “Um poeta lírico”

3.1 The waiter / poet Korriscosso

Everything mentioned hitherto helps to contextualize my analysis of the short story “Um poeta lírico” (1880) as self-reflexive fiction about Eça de Queiroz’s condition as a migrant, alienated from Portugal, and more precisely about someone who cannot unfold his identity as a notorious writer as he would in his homeland. The reader is invited to project this dilemma on the nameless first-person narrator and character, an experienced traveler. After arriving at his hotel at Charing Cross in London, he becomes curious about one of the restaurant waiters, clearly identified as a Mediterranean immigrant, noting in him “such a clear expression of despondency” and being impressed by his physiognomy of “a long, sad face, very dark, with a Jewish nose and [...] a beard of Christ in romantic print”.²⁰ When the traveler is attended by this skinny, slightly hunched man with long hair, he is reading Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King*. It is an opulent edition, displaying rich elements of the Arthurian epic on the cover. It seems that the waiter is interested in the book (197). Later on, informed by a friend, Bracolletti, who identifies this person as an immigrant from Athens named Korriscosso, the narrator is promptly misguided by prejudice, concluding that the waiter’s interest must be in the material value (199–200). In the end he discovers that the Greek servant, who steals the book, is not only an enthusiastic reader of Tennyson but also a famous poet in his homeland, exiled for some obscure political reason (202).

Curiously, the analogy between the first-person narrator and the subject of the biographical fiction has been neglected by academic studies. The opposition between poetry and prose is commonly considered the main theme of “Um poeta lírico” – a somehow tautological title. According to this interpretation (see Lepecki 1994; Machado 2002), the prosaic reality of serving meals and drinks causes a silent suffering to the sublime identity and an ongoing psychosomatic decay. Ultimately, this apparently irreversible situation is reinforced by his unrequited love to a blond waitress who does everything to entice a corpulent policeman, described as “a mountain of flesh erected from a forest of beards” in

²⁰ “uma expressão tão evidente de desalento”; “um carão longo e triste, muito moreno, de nariz judaico e [...] uma barba de Cristo em estampa romântica; [...]” (196). All references with this simplified indication refer to “Um poeta lírico” (Queiroz 2009).

contrast to the “body of a sad phthisic”.²¹ Significantly, this clear embodiment of the poetry / prose dichotomy becomes relativized by a linguistic argument since the waitress is far from being insensible to “ardent emotions, expressed in melodious language”²²:

Mas Korriscosso só pode escrever as suas elegias na sua língua materna... E Fanny não comprehende grego... E Korriscosso é só um grande homem – em grego...

[But Korriscosso can only write his elegies in his mother tongue... And Fanny does not understand Greek... And Korriscosso is only a great man – in Greek...] (205).

By drawing this conclusion, the narrator enhances the core theme of literary creativity under migrant conditions²³ which refer to both the traveler and the waiter, albeit determined by different social levels. This becomes clear in the linguistic dimension present in their first encounters: while the Greek waiter announces the breakfast service “num inglês silabado” (196) [in an English pronounced syllable by syllable]²⁴, the (Portuguese) traveler, a regular customer of this hotel at Charing Cross, has the leisure to read English poetry while being attended. Only by stealing the book and retreating to his humble abode the poor servant succeeds in obtaining the same privilege.

One night, when the hotel client gets lost in the corridors, he comes to discover by chance not only the theft but also his error. Spying the Greek at a table strewn with papers writing stanzas of an ode, he senses his intelligence and poetic taste. Korriscosso seems more embarrassed by the revelation of his identity and “de ter no corpo a casaca coçada de criado de restaurante” (201) [having on his body the shabby jacket of a waiter], than by the charge of theft. He remains silent for this is not the moment to communicate in the servile English discourse he is used to at work:

Mas as páginas do volume que eu abri responderam por ele; a brancura das margens largas desaparecia sob uma rede de comentários a lápis: *Sublime! Grandioso! Divino!* – pa-

²¹ “uma montanha de carne eriçada de uma floresta de barbas” (204); “o corpo de tísico triste” (205).

²² “sentimentos ardentes, expressos em linguagem melodiosa...” (205)

²³ There is no doubt about Eça de Queiroz's sensibility concerning migrant working conditions as proven in 1872–74, during his first consular service in Havana: Upon his arrival he found Chinese workers from the Portuguese colony of Macao in a state of severe exploitation. He not only took it upon himself to better their condition, but also wrote a major indictment criticizing the Cuban plantation system (see Coleman 1980: 156).

²⁴ Notably the speech itself appears in Portuguese: “ – Já está servido o almoço das sete...” [The seven o'clock breakfast is already served...] (196).

lavras lançadas numa letra convulsiva, um tremor de mão, agitada por uma sensibilidade vibrante...

[But the pages of the volume I opened answered for him; the whiteness of the wide margins disappeared under a network of penciled comments: *Sublime! Grand! Divine!* – words launched in a convulsive handwriting, a tremor of hand, agitated by a vibrant sensibility...] (201)

These comments are reproduced in Portuguese. The same domestication refers to the titles of Greek journals in which Korriscosso published, *Ecos da Ática* and *A Trombeta da Argólida*, as well as to his volume *Suspiros de Trácia* (202). This is the only title of his work mentioned in the condensed biography which the narrator presents based on the conversation he had with the poet, presumably in French as the quoted expression “*là-bas*” (202), pejoratively referring to Greece, insinuates.²⁵ Nothing is said about the narrator’s proficiency to read or to speak Greek. As in the novel *A Relíquia*, the text itself remains almost entirely monolingual, hiding the multilingualism which contributes to the meaning in this specific case of “Um poeta lírico”. Only a few expressions and lexical terms appear in English, French, and Italian – but not a single Greek word except the strange proper name Korriscosso and some toponymics. The poet recites the odes, obviously written in his mother tongue, to the (Portuguese) traveler who, without understanding Greek, is enthusiastic about the “ferocidade de linguagem” [ferocity of language] and the “gritos de alma dilacerada” [screams of a torn soul] (204). Does not the same apply to him as to the blond waitress? Despite being sensible to the expressions in melodious language, it is impossible for him to present Korriscosso as a great man, since this would only be possible in Greek.

The hidden multilingualism between Korriscosso and the traveler / narrator precisely indicates an intrinsic companionship. Both are migrants and writers coming from Southern European countries with languages in subaltern positions with respect to English and French. The poet’s Christ-like suffering, already present in the first physiognomic portrayal and later asserted in the narrator’s comments on his poetry, mirrors the dilemma of literary creativity in a cultural and linguistic “exile” that refers to Eça de Queiroz himself. Reduced to the pragmatic use of gastronomic language, Korriscosso suffers grotesquely from the lack of conversation about which the Portuguese writer complains in his letters from Newcastle and Bristol, where his existence is reduced to diplomatic service. Confined to a repertoire of English sentences in subaltern speech acts, the Greek cannot demonstrate in public his poetic eloquence, which once

²⁵ Repeatedly, Korriscosso is observed as a reader of *Journal des Debats* (199; 200).

launched his ephemeral political career in Athens (202). The intended reader easily recognizes contemporary Portugal in the caricature of Greece's governmental instability.²⁶ Hence, the present occupation as a waiter makes the parody work, establishing an ambivalent dialogical relation to the narrator's position which oscillates between sympathy and superiority.

The nameless traveler is touched by the exiled Greek poet caught in the act of writing odes. Significantly, the narrator seems to forget to tell this important fact, only revealing it after his own confession: “Eu também sou poeta!” [I'm also a poet!]: “Porque não lhes disse?, o que Korriscosso estava escrevendo, numa tira de papel, eram estrofes: era uma ode” [Why didn't I tell you? what Korriscosso was writing, on a strip of paper, were stanzas: it was an ode] (201).

His literary creativity is stirred by commenting enthusiastically on *Idylls of the King*. This mirrors Eça's own attempt, presumably in the years 1876–78, to transcreate Tennyson's poems, composing “Sir Galahad” without ever finishing it (Queiroz 2003). M. H. Piwnik (2003: 53–54) identifies the 1869 republication as the most likely basis containing the parts *The Holy Grail* and *The Passing of Arthur*, without excluding the French version of *Les Idylles de Roi* published in the same year. Unlike Korriscosso's odes, the text is in prose. It is important to consider that Tennyson himself rewrites the ancient Arthurian epic in antiquated English lyrics, expressing thus a kind of exile on the discursive level that is also present as a theme: the situation of the Knights of the Round Table after the disappearance of King Arthur in Avalon. Exactly this is the narrator's stance, chosen by Eça de Queiroz for his text, giving voice to Sir Galahad, who searched for the Holy Grail, and then to Sir Belvedere, now living as a monk, who witnessed King Arthur's end. It seems to be more than a coincidence that Sir Galahad's discourse begins with a Romantic landscape of the soul similar to the one on the first page of “Um poeta lírico”:

Às vezes na noite deserta, por um céu de muita geada, atravesso uma cidade: [...]: os telhados agudos estão carregados de neve: [...] e o meu pensamento vai para os jardins de Camelot, e para o Solar de Artur

[Sometimes in the deserted night with a sky of heavy frost, I wander through a city: [...]: the pointed roofs are heavily covered with snow: [...] and my thoughts roam to the gardens of Camelot and to King Arthur's Court] (Queiroz 2003: 119).

Curiously, the city mentioned here remains unidentified and does not reappear. In “Um poeta lírico”, the unceasing snowfall in London on a Sunday morning in

²⁶ The comparison between the two nations as similar cases of decadence in the European panorama is frequent in public Portuguese discourse in the second half of the 19th century.

December becomes linked to the waiter's displacement intuitively perceived by the traveler before learning of his exiled condition: “[...], e toda a sua magreza friorenta se encolhia ao aspecto daqueles telhados cobertos de neve, na sensação daquele silêncio lívido...” [and all his shivering thinness shrunk at the site of those snow-covered roofs, sensing the livid silence...] (196). The similar wording in the two texts suggests not only an analogy between Sir Galahad and Korriscosso but also the idea of the nameless traveler / narrator as the author's figuration. His feeling of displacement in London, akin to Korriscosso's, is already signaled – before the first utterance of speech – by the fact that he stares into the same chimney fire (195), while outside the snow is falling. Throughout the text, the shared condition of Southern Europeans living in the North does not cancel out the distance, established not only by the different social category but also by prejudice towards Greek emigrants to the Levant as “vile plebs, part pirate and part lackey, a cunning and perverse gang of prey”.²⁷ The narrator recognizes the eventual injustice, referring to this pejorative image as having originated in philhellenic disillusion (199).

Nonetheless, his prejudice continues even after the revelation of the waiter's hidden identity and despite the pity felt for “poor Korriscosso” (201). The traveler stretches out both hands, confessing “I am also a poet”, as he remembers that “nothing impresses the Levanter more than a gesture of drama and stage”.²⁸ The explicitly histrionic gesture and a sentence that “could seem grotesque and of impudence to a man from the North” are interpreted by the “Levanter” as an “expansion of a twin soul”.²⁹ Hence, the companionship of letters is an illusion intentionally created by the traveller who maintains his superiority.

3.2 The Levanter Bracoletti

This has to be linked to Bracolletti, who reveals the identity of Korriscosso as an immigrant from Athens – but not as a poet. Reluctantly yielding to the narrator's curiosity, he drops some details of their acquaintance already characterized by Korriscosso's migrant condition, working as his secretary in Bulgaria and Montenegro (199). This subalternity does not match with the “solemn, ten-

²⁷ “uma plebe torpe, parte pirata e parte lacaia, bando de rapina astuto e perverso.” (200)

²⁸ “Lembrei-me que nada impressiona o homem do Levante como um gesto de drama e de palco; estendi-lhe ambas as mãos [...], e disse-lhe: — Eu também sou poeta!...” (201)

²⁹ “Esta frase extraordinária pareceria grotesca e impudente a um homem do Norte; o levantino viu logo nela a expansão de uma alma irmã.” (201)

der and sincere shake-hands” observed by the narrator as proof of friendship between both.³⁰ It also seems incongruent that Bracolletti stirs up prejudice against Korriscosso since the category of Levanter could be applied even more to his own identity, only apparently Italian but in fact born of Greek parents in Smyrna. Probably, Eça de Queiroz was familiar with the two volumes of Francis Hervé’s *A residence in Greece and Turkey, with notes of the journey through Bulgaria, Servia, Hungary and the Balkan* (1837). For my analysis of “Um poeta lírico”, the attribution of a reduced multilingual proficiency to the Levanter is significant:

A regular Levanter is supposed to speak several languages badly, and none well. The Greek spoken at Smyrna is execrable. [...]. His answers are generally evasive: he fears to give you a direct one, lest he might in any shape compromise his interests. (Hervé 1837, 1: 326).

This definition, curiously mentioning Smyrna, matches perfectly with Bracolletti, who repeats the exclamation “Eh! mon Dieu!”, when asked about Korriscosso. Far from being annoyed, the narrator praises the evasiveness of his friend, comparing this behavior with “the Gods of Attica who retire to their cloud when in trouble on earth”.³¹ Bracolletti’s lack of eloquence does not matter, since he is gifted with “a sweet look, which reminds me of that of a Syrian animal: [...] in its soft fluid seems to wander the tender religiosity of the races from which stem the Messiahs”.³² The narrator’s admiration is superlative describing his smile as “the most complex, the most perfect, the richest of the human expressions”.³³

The praise of non-linguistic expression and of a speech reduced to the exclamation “Eh! mon Dieu!” is in clear contrast to the silent suffering of the eloquent Greek poet, who as a waiter is confined to the English gastronomic discourse, significantly reproduced in Portuguese.³⁴ Hence, the antagonistic constellation is more meaningful than the traditional interpretation of the fat

30 “foi um *shake-hands* solene, enternecido e sincero” (199). Here the English expression may already hint at hypocrisy.

31 “[...], como os deuses da Ática que, nos seus embraços no mundo, se recolhiam à sua nuvem, Bracolletti refugiou-se na sua vaga reticência. — Eh! mon Dieu... Eh! mon Dieu!...” (199)

32 “Um olhar doce, que me faz lembrar o dos animais da Síria: [...] Parece errar no seu fluido macio a religiosidade meiga das raças que dão os Messias...” (198)

33 “O sorriso de Bracolletti é a mais complexa, a mais perfeita, a mais rica das expressões humanas; [...].” (198)

34 An English quotation only refers to the restaurant clients who always add “if you please” when asking the waiter for mustard or cheese (203).

Bracolletti and the thin Korriscosso as an embodiment of the before-mentioned prose / poetry dichotomy. This becomes even more prominent when the narrator's great admiration for the divinely smiling friend seems unaffected by his "debility" of methodically collecting girls between twelve and fourteen years in the slums of London and keeping them "at home like canary birds in a cage".³⁵ Once again, the discursive aspect is of interest: Bracolletti wants them not only "skinny" and "very blond", but with "the habit of cursing".³⁶ Aroused by being insulted with the (unquoted) English slang obscenities, he expresses his enthusiasm in the Italian with which he grew up on the Syrian coast: " – Piccolina! Gentilleta!" (199).

This behavior is clearly set in parodic analogy to Korriscosso's literary creativity motivated by an enthusiasm for Tennyson's verses about the Knights of the Round Table. Bracolletti's reduced multilingualism contrasts with the poet's hidden multilingualism which indicates, according to my interpretation, an intrinsic proximity to the hotel client who also confesses to being a poet but doing so with feigned sincerity. The ambivalence between sympathy and superiority towards the Greek emigrant is maintained until the last sentence of the short story: "Sempre que ele me serve dou-lhe um xelim de gorjeta: e depois, ao sair, aperto-lhe sinceramente a mão" [every time he serves me, I give him a shilling as a tip: and then, on leaving, I sincerely shake his hand] (205).

4 Conclusion: the poetological function of hidden multilingualism

How can the same narrator, understood as the author's figuration, be full of sincere admiration for an immoral person without any capacity of coherent speech in any language? A comparative view on the sly bachelor Teodorico, the protagonist and narrator in *A Reliquia*, may give a concluding idea about the immoral but successful Levanter Bracolletti, who, in contrast with the poor poet Korriscosso, embodies a different attitude towards dilettantism: shameless affirmation instead of vacillation. The first suggests the abandonment of any rhetorical effort – being his smile superlatively valued – while the latter refers to the dilemma of literary creativity and eloquence under migrant conditions. Korriscosso does not invalidate the philhellenic disillusion with the disappear-

35 "Instala-as em casa, e ali as tem, como passarinhos na gaiola, [...]" (198).

36 "[...]: gosta delas magrinhas, muito louras, e com o hábito de praguejar" (198).

ance of the “glories of an aesthetical and free race”.³⁷ Instead of composing odes inspired by ancient Greek culture, he only takes up writing after enthusiastically reading the *Idylls of the King*.

Hence, the fictional character and the Portuguese writer, both inspired by Tennyson’s adaptation of Arthurian epic in antiquated English, and both displaced in the winter of London, accept their own cultural patrimony in a subaltern position. It is reduced – as Eça de Queiroz puts it in “O Francesismo” – to “a certain sincere background of lyrical sadness”.³⁸ In conclusion, the commented reading and creative translating of French and English literature can be considered the discursive hiding and eventually vanishing of a Greek / Portuguese writer who disappears as such in London (or Paris) and fears to be forgotten in Athens / Lisbon. If so, Korriscosso has to be seen as Eça’s double, with his strange name phonetically similar to Queiroz.³⁹ Contrasting with Bracoletti’s divine smile and shamelessly exhibited lack of speech, the hidden Greek odes are the metonymy of a literary dilettantism, demonstrating an incapacity of asserting one’s own voice.

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37 “glórias de uma raça estética e livre” (199). According to the condensed biography presented by the narrator, Korriscosso writes his first elegies when working as a hotel interpreter (202).

38 “[...] eu sou em quase tudo um francês – exceto num certo fundo sincero de tristeza lírica, [...].” (Queiroz 2000: 235–236).

39 A few years after “Um poeta lírico”, Eça de Queiroz found another ‘mate’, this time going beyond a fictional character: he recovered the collective invention of the poet Carlos Fradique Mendes (1865–66) by “posthumously” publishing his letters. This specific editorial fiction was directly inspired by Hippolyte Taine’s feigning of the North American industrialist Frédéric-Thomas Graindorge as author of *Notes sur Paris* (1867), written in French. Fradique Mendes, conceived as an upper-class intellectual living in Paris, renounces authorship limiting his creativity to conversation and letters, partly written in French. *Correspondência de Fradique Mendes* (1888) exists as an “original text” only in Portuguese, being some letters – mainly to his beloved Clara – “translated from French” (Queiroz 2014: 289–328).

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