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# JEWISH MYSTICISM AND WESTERN ESOTERICISM IN THE WORKS OF A PORTUGUESE POET, FERNANDO PESSOA (1888-1935)

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Fernando Pessoa, who has been the object of my research work for a long time, was born in Lisbon in 1888 and lived there until 1896, when his mother, having become a widow two years before, married the portuguese consul in Durban. Pessoa would not leave this town until 1905, when he decided to come back to Portugal, not wishing to pursue his studies at Cape University, as he could have done, having won the Queen Victoria Memorial Prize, created by the Young Jewish Guild of South Africa.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, he always kept alive the English cultural background he had acquired in South Africa, and had a special literary devotion for authors like Shakespeare and Milton. Pessoa's personal library was mainly composed of English books,<sup>2</sup> and it is no surprise that his first poems should be written in this language. Later on, he even considered the possibility of

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<sup>1</sup> See H.D. JENNINGS, *Os Dois Exílios*, [Porto], Centro de Estudos Pessoaanos, 1984.

<sup>2</sup> We may quote the following titles, among many others, concerning the subject that interests us here : Loring W. BATTEN, *The Hebrew Prophet*, London, Methuen, 1905 ; Chilperic EDWARDS, *The Messianic Idea*, London, Watts, [s.d.] ; Caesar MORGAN, *An Investigation of the Trinity of Plato and of Philo Judaeus*, Cambridge, University Press, [s. d.] ; Walter Gorn OLD, *The Kabala of Numbers : A Handbook of Interpretation*, London, Rider, 1911 ; Alexander Graham SHORTT, *Adam's Calendar and Other Chronological Prophecies of the Old Testament*, London, Rider, [s.d.] ; Zohar, *The Kabbalah Unveiled*, ed. and trans.S.L[iddell] Mac Gregor Mathers, London, Paul, 1926.

taking an English *heteronym*<sup>3</sup>, Thomas Cross, who would have written a book on Freemasonry in Portugal, along with some occultist texts, and would have represented, for English speaking readers, Pessoa's epic and messianic side. <sup>4</sup>One of the first *heteronyms* regularly used by Pessoa was in fact Alexander Search, under whose name he wrote, between 1905 and 1908, a number of poems, equally in English, and already marked by his fascination for the Unknown.

It is clear that it was through English authors that Pessoa became acquainted with esoteric literature. Such an interest for these questions was not exceptional among contemporary writers and artists. The way had been prepared by authors like Eliphas Lévi (Alphonse Louis Constant, 1810-1875), whose main works- *Clefs des Grands Mystères et Dogme et Rituel de Haute Magie* (1856)– largely inspired from Jewish Kabbalah and Magic, aroused great curiosity among intellectuals, specially because he connected Kabbalah with the Tarot, which constituted a main innovation. <sup>5</sup>Lévi had been introduced by Bulwer Lytton (1803-1873), who had written *The Last Days of Pompei* (1834) and *Zanoni* (1844), into the *Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia*, which counted several writers among its members. The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in the Outer, which sprang from the S.R.I.A., attracted people like Mathers, who published, in 1887, *Kabbala Unveiled*, A.E.Waite (1857-1942)<sup>6</sup>, W.B.Yeats

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<sup>3</sup> Fernando Pessoa created a number of literary personalities, possessing each a biography and a particular style, which he called *heteronyms*.

<sup>4</sup> See Teresa Rita LOPES, *Fernando Pessoa et le drame symboliste. Héritage et création*, Paris, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1977, p.154.

<sup>5</sup> See Christopher MCINTOSH, *Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival*, London, Rider and Company, 1972.

<sup>6</sup> According to Gershom SCHOLEM in *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York, Schocken Books, 1946), Arthur Edward Waite belonged to the number of those Christian scholars who took a real interest into Kabbalism, even if they did not sufficiently take into account historical and philological data. Scholem also speaks about the 'false conceptions' of Eliphas Lévi, and the 'highly coloured charlatanism' of Aleister Crowley.

(1865-1939) and Aleister Crowley (1875-1947). Pessoa was familiar with these authors and, in 1930, he even met Crowley, who came to Lisbon in order to know him, the two men having corresponded about Astrology.

Long before this « extra-ordinary » meeting, Pessoa had had another unexpected contact, but this time essential for his future spiritual trend, that with the Theosophical Society. In fact, due to his perfect knowledge of English language, he had received, in 1915, a proposal to translate into Portuguese the works of some of the main theosophical authors, like C.W. Leadbeater, Annie Besant and H.P. Blavatsky. He felt so impressed by their works that he went through a deep spiritual and psychological crisis. From that time on, he never quitted the esoteric field, and his poetry bears evidence of his quest, particularly in the only work to have been published during his lifetime, in 1934, *Mensagem* (Message), a book made of poems composed around the figure of King Sebastian, a young portuguese sovereign having disappeared in a moroccan battlefield in 1578. The belief in his return became throughout the centuries a national religion, based on a particular form of messianism, the *Sebastianism*, to which Fernando Pessoa added a mythical and esoteric dimension.

Nevertheless, 1932 had been the year when his great esoteric poems were written, as *Na Sombra do Monte Abiegnio* (In the Shade of Mount Abiegnus) or *Cavaleiro-Monge* (Knight-Monk). He also writes the preface for the book *Alma Errante* (Wandering Soul) of his friend Eliezer Kamenezky, a russian Jew living in Lisbon, a bookseller as well as a poet who used to participate in the long discussions among the members of the portuguese intelligentsia, in the downtown cafés. In this preface, Pessoa speaks about Masonry, Kabbalah, Temple and Rosicrucianism. He pretends Kabbalistic speculation never attains real abstraction and spirituality as Sephiroth, Archangels or Angels are still somehow « material ».<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Fernando PESSOA, *Obra Poética e em Prosa*, vol.III, Porto, Lello e Irmão, 1986, p. 462-472.

Two years later, he will write another preface, this time for his friend the journalist Augusto Ferreira Gomes, where he exposes his theories about the Fifth Empire, inspired from the Book of Daniel, and considered by Pessoa as bound to be portuguese and ruled by King Sebastian, ‘who has the kabbalistic number of the Portuguese Country’<sup>8</sup> and will return one day to restore the glory of Portugal.<sup>9</sup>

Another concept which will quite often appear in Pessoa’s poetry, that of an absent God leaving Man alone to face emptiness, was first expressed in English, about 1918, in his 35 *Sonnets* : ‘Are we mere intervals, God’s Absence and no more, / Hollows in real Consciousness and Thought ?’.<sup>10</sup> These sonnets, full of metaphysical questions, testify of a much more mature thought than that of his first English poems, like *The Circle* (1907) :

I traced a circle on the ground,  
It was a mystic figure strange  
Wherein I thought there would abound  
Mute symbols adequate of change,  
And complex formulas of Law,  
Which is the jaws of Change’s maw.

My simpler thoughts in vain had stemmed  
The current of this madness free,  
But that my thinking is condemned

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p.654-655.

<sup>9</sup> See Ana Maria BINET, *L’Esotérisme dans l’Oeuvre de Fernando Pessoa*, Université Michel de Montaigne-Bordeaux III, 1996, p.72-104.

<sup>10</sup> Fernando PESSOA, *Obra Poética e em Prosa*, vol.I, Porto, Lello e Irmão, 1986, p.484.

To symbol and analogy :  
 I deemed a circle might condense  
 With calm all mystery's violence

And so in cabalistic mood  
 A circle traced I curious there ;  
 Imperfect the made circle stood  
 Though formed with minutest care  
 From magic's failure deeply I  
 A lesson took to make me sigh.<sup>11</sup>

Obscure and naïve, this poem tells us about an unachieved magical experience, which is rather characteristic of what Pessoa's approach of the Occult would always be. However, even if we get the impression, after having carefully read and analyzed Pessoa's works, that he did not succeed in going so far as he would wish in his spiritual quest, we clearly see that his « esoteric thought » became, along the years, deeper, more mature we might say, nourished by his own reflection and by his intensive reading.

Nevertheless, he never abandoned the main themes of poetry written in his young age. We may give, as an example of what we assert, his conception of God, which is present in his poetry from his youth to his manhood and can be related to apophatism or negative theology and its assumption of a definitive gap between the Creator and His Creature. Having its roots in Platon, negative theology was, as it is well known, developed by Clement of Alexandry and the Gnostics. It becomes an important trend in christian theology with Gregory of Nisse

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* p.724-725.

(4th century) and the Pseudo-Denys (5<sup>th</sup> century) in his *Mystical Theology*. Master Eckhart (1260-1327) follows this same path, as does Jacob Böhme (1575-1624) with the concept of *Ungrund* or, before him, Saint John of the Cross (1542-1591), whose poetry is clearly marked by mystical emptiness.

In the same way, Jewish philosophers and kabbalists have always insisted on the impossibility of conferring any attribute on God. Maïmonide (1135-1204), for instance, considers one cannot express oneself about God otherwise than negatively. Besides, kabbalists make, of course, a clear distinction between *En Sof*, the absolute transcendency, hidden and infinite, and the ten *Sephiroth*, divine manifestations man is able to perceive. In this light, we can say with Fernando Pessoa that God is ‘Vast beyond Vastness / Not-Being, haunting Himself...’ and that ‘Universe is but His trail’. ‘Absolute stair without steps.../ Vision that won’t be seen...’, God remains a ‘Glow of the Unknown...’ in this poem called *Além-Deus* (Beyond God),<sup>12</sup> one of the few poems in portuguese language that can be associated to apophatic mysticism.

In his unfinished poem *Primeiro Fausto* (First Faust), Pessoa expresses once more this idea of a God one cannot explain, or name, an absolute abstraction :

God does not understand Himself.  
His origin is more divine than Himself,  
And He has not the origin that words  
Think they make us think...  
The abstract Being [in His] abstract idea  
Went out, and I remained in the eternal night.

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p.1092.

Me and Mystery- face to face....<sup>13</sup>

This immediate intuition of a relationship with God, or Mystery, this feeling of a divine Presence, seem to us to be characteristic of a true mystical experience. However, writing about this poem, a portuguese essayist, Dalila Pereira da Costa, makes the following comment :

This rationalism into which portuguese Jews, Spinoza, Uriel da Costa, or Portuguese of Jewish origin, frequently fall, a rationalism which may even lead to extreme atheistic and heretic negation, we find it to be present in this poem, along with a desperate quest for God, for this ever indissoluble negation, to which they will never be able to renounce.<sup>14</sup>

Referring to Pessoa's remote Jewish origins, Dalila Pereira da Costa stresses what she considers a danger in negative theology, i.e., the negation of the very idea of God. As for us, we are convinced that the intuition of a metaphysical Reality always occupied the centre of Pessoa's spiritual experience, even though God remained 'this Being nobody understands'.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, p.614.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p.586

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p.615.

It is furthermore interesting to note that once Pessoa wrote, on a bit of paper, as he often used to do, the following words : ‘Being, Universe, Not-Being- this is the triple manifestation of the Unknown’<sup>16</sup>-an Unknown only perceptible through His manifestations, the sole and unique Unity of mystic, desperately out of reach for most men. This absolute transcendency, the *Absconditum*, may be considered to reflect itself into the Creation through « mirrors », thus opening a breach in apophatic theology, through which Divine Light penetrates the different stages of being. As Henry Corbin puts it, ‘the Angel is the *Absconditum* absolving Itself from Its « abscondity »’.<sup>17</sup> Fernando Pessoa was always sensitive to this possibility of an union with transcendency through the perception of angels. For him, man has thus a chance to reintegrate his true nature, his complete being, lost since the Fall, and his primal nakedness : ‘Then Archangels of the Path / Undress you and let you naked’ (*Iniciação*).<sup>18</sup> Angels reveal the Unique Being, who reflects Himself into a multiplicity of spiritual stages, obeying to a hierarchic order.<sup>19</sup>

In a letter to his friend Adolfo Casais Monteiro, dated from the 13<sup>th</sup> of January 1935, Fernando Pessoa refers very precisely to this conception, common to neoplatonism, Jewish Kabbalah, Islamic and occidental theosophy, of an Universe inhabited by beings with different degrees of spirituality, a theophanic splitting, as it were, of the Supreme Being :

I believe in the existence of worlds superior to ours and of  
inhabitants of those worlds, corresponding to experiences

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<sup>16</sup> See António PINA COELHO, *Os Fundamentos Filosóficos da Obra de Fernando Pessoa*, (vol.I), Lisboa, Verbo, 1971, p.181.

<sup>17</sup> Henry CORBIN, *Le paradoxe du monothéisme*, Paris, L’Herne, 1981, p.184.

<sup>18</sup> Fernando PESSOA, *Obra Poética e em Prosa*, vol.I, *op.cit.*, p.1133.

<sup>19</sup> See Henry CORBIN, *op.cit.*, p.105-108.

of different degrees of spirituality, more and more subtle  
until a Supreme Being, who probably created this world.<sup>20</sup>

Angels seem to be, to our poet, a sign of hope glowing in the mist of earthly ignorance :

My lips are as lips kissed.  
My sad soul happy sings.  
O shining through the mist  
Of tremulous angels' wings !<sup>21</sup>

This relationship with invisible beings was always a spiritual aim for Pessoa and a subject of poetic inspiration. It nourished, of course, western esotericism in general, which always insisted upon the importance of these entities, intermediaries between God and His creature, and corresponding to different spiritual degrees, with whom one may communicate, usually after a long and difficult initiation. These different forms of divine manifestations, called angels in monotheistic religions, can be related to what the Jewish Kabbalah calls *Sephirot*, as we have already seen. The ladder to Divinity, which these divine manifestations constitute, must be climbed slowly, and even painfully, if one wants to have a glimpse of what the ultimate truth, the original unity, may be. Otherwise, one is bound to stay in the realm of

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<sup>20</sup> Fernando PESSOA, *Obras Poéticas e em Prosa*, vol.II, Porto Lello e Irmão, 1986, p.344.

<sup>21</sup> Fernando PESSOA, *The Mad Fiddler*, Biblioteca Nacional de Lisboa, Espólio Pessoa, 59.

multiplicity : ‘When He created what exists / He took away from it infinity / And even unity’<sup>22</sup>.

Inaccessible to human reason, God remains a mystery, the Unique Reality Pessoa always looked for. He would often feel desperate not to be able to find this ultimate truth, who would save him from an interior chaos. Mystery is no doubt one of the very few essential themes in Pessoa’s works not to have been dealt with irony or a tendency to mystification. It aroused in him a metaphysical awe which can be read between the lines of his poetry and prose :

I want to escape mystery

But where can I escape ?

It is life and death

O pain, where can I go ?<sup>23</sup>

Fernando Pessoa shares with poets like Goethe and Novalis this deep sense of mystery, along with the feeling of attraction and repulsion, of fascination and horror it awakens in him simultaneously :

No, no, not that !

Everything except knowing what Mystery is !

Surface of Universe, o closed eyelids,

Never open yourselves !

I would not stand the look of Final Truth !<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Fernando PESSOA, *Poesias Inéditas (1919-1930)*, Lisboa, Atica, 1963, p.170.

<sup>23</sup> Fernando PESSOA, *Poemas Dramáticos*, Lisboa, Atica, 1966, p.75.

This fundamental religious feeling, that Rudolf Otto calls the « numinous feeling », <sup>25</sup>brings about, according to Otto, the conscience of being essentially and definitively in an inferior position : ‘Before this sole reality mystery is, / [...] everything man does, / everything man says, / [...] seems so little !’. <sup>26</sup>Far from God, Who remains beyond time and space, the world is condemned to stay alone, mute, empty :

And, near or far, great mute lake,  
The world, this shapeless world where life exists...  
And God, the Great Vault at the end of everything... <sup>27</sup>

A small text, from the *Livro do Desassossego* (Book of Disquietude) proves once more the suffering brought about by this terrible quest after mystery :

I spent nights full of awe leaning over books of mystics  
and kabbalists, that I was never able to read otherwise than  
trembling [...] . The ritual and prayers of Rosicrucian, the  
symbols [...] of Kabbala and Templars [...] - I suffered for  
a long time for having approached all that. My days were  
filled with fever and poisonous speculations (...) - and I

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<sup>24</sup> Fernando PESSOA, *Poesias de Alvaro de Campos*, Lisboa, Atica, 1964, p.262.

<sup>25</sup> Rudolf OTTO, *Le Sacré*, Paris, Payot, 1929, p. 21-32.

<sup>26</sup> Fernando PESSOA, *Poesias de Alvaro de Campos*, *op.cit.*, p.93.

<sup>27</sup> Fernando PESSOA, *Poesias*, Lisboa, Atica, 1967, p.62.

used to get a false vital stimulus from the painful and  
 prescient sensation of being on the verge of discovering a  
 supreme mystery.’<sup>28</sup>

*Tremendum* and *fascinans* at the same time,<sup>29</sup> the way that leads to mystery goes through  
 ‘souls and stars, across the forest of Terror...and God, end of the infinite road, waits in the  
 silence of His majesty...’<sup>30</sup> The real meaning of Being remains veiled, unattainable :

Beyond God ! Beyond God ! Dark stillness...

Sudden gleam of the Unknown...

O my soul, everything has another meaning,

Including the fact of having a meaning...<sup>31</sup>

This is a terrifying vision that annihilates the poet, who goes through a kind of experience that  
 is very near to a mystic one, full of a feeling of sacred awe that leads him to a state near to  
 madness :

The mystery of everything

Comes so close to my being,

Approaches so near to my soul’s eyes,

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<sup>28</sup> Fernando PESSOA, *Livro do Desassossego (II) por Bernardo Soares*, Lisboa, Atica, 1982, p.62, 63.

<sup>29</sup> Rudolf OTTO, *op. cit*, p.57.

<sup>30</sup> Fernando PESSOA, *Cartas a Armando Côrtes-Rodrigues*, Lisboa, Horizonte, 1985, p.47.

<sup>31</sup> Fernando PESSOA, *Obra Poética e em Prosa*, vol. I, *op.cit*, p.1093.

That I melt in darkness and universe...

In darkness I feel obscurely awe-stricken.<sup>32</sup>

Mystery lies in the heart of Darkness in this poem that reminds us of Böhme's *Mysterium Magnum*, even if, as far as Pessoa is concerned, the mystical dimension is not strong enough to counterbalance the overwhelming feeling of anguish and despair that weighs over the poet's shoulders. The absolute gap between man and God ('God is a great Interval') is not yet fully accepted and assimilated. Only the voice of God is heard crossing this abyss ('In the night a voice is shining.../ From inside Outerness I heard it...'), that must be accepted as such by man: 'From my idea of the world I fell.../ Void beyond depthlessness...' Only thus will the poet be able to search the right way over the abyss and let his soul face mystery, which is hiding behind the world perceived by our senses: 'Between the tree and seeing it, / Where is the dream?'.<sup>33</sup>

The unconceivable *Deus absconditus* manifests Himself thus, and the poet transposes into his poetry this intuition that cannot be imparted through everyday words. Only metaphor will approach what remains unutterable, thus giving us a chance to partake from that sense of totality the mystical experience seems to allow, even if briefly.

Abyss, negation, vertigo, such is the darkness that recovers the *absconditus* and *tremendum* Mystery; but it can also be felt as soothing by the poet, who paradoxally defined it as 'that spot of light we call Shadow, the great spot beyond Gods'.<sup>34</sup> Light and Darkness are of the same essence, but Light deserted our world, letting Shadow occupy it. However, Light

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, p.608.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p.1092.

<sup>34</sup> Fernando PESSOA, *Páginas Íntimas e de Auto-Interpretação*, Lisboa, Atica, [s.d.], p.325.

remains hidden in the pervading Darkness and the poet, having lost all sense of identity, 'mere echo' of himself, feels 'submerged / By waves of black fire / Where he drowns in God'<sup>35</sup>. He calls God out of the abyss, 'Absolute stair without steps.../ Vision that won't be seen...' <sup>36</sup>. Through paradox, he tries to express what cannot be expressed, an experience that remains out of reach for any attempt to make it enter into any kind of language structures or rational standards. Transcendancy is thus defined by Pessoa as 'being and not being at the same time, existing apart and not apart from its manifestation, being real and not real in that manifestation'<sup>37</sup>. In an unachieved poem, entitled *Isaac Loria*, the poet makes this XVIth century kabbalist from Safed ask himself : 'What else am I than the one who denies what he is inside ?' To be or not to be, the pendulum movement between assertion and negation touches not only the poet's vision of the world and its Creator, but also the identity of Luria, in this case, but above all that of Pessoa himself. Capable of evoking the multiple personalities that compose his inner self, he is, in his own way, a kind of magician, like Luria, whom he pictures in this poem summoning gods and devils, among other powers : 'in a huge victorious way, / how many powers from beyond have I called !' Fearing to lose himself because of this lust for power, he decides 'to burn / the sacred books, a part of which he once had been, / To break his magical instruments', letting behind him 'the looming and true shade beyond the Atrium', and feeling 'the last pain and extreme horror' awakening in him. Finally, he abandons his material being and his power and renounces to his previous life in order to come

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<sup>35</sup> Fernando PESSOA, *Obra Poética e em Prosa*, vol.I, *op.cit.*, p.1092.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Fernando PESSOA, *Obra Poética e em Prosa*, vol.II, *op.cit.*, p.1189.

closer to God.<sup>38</sup> On this same subject, we have another unachieved poem by Pessoa, which bears a double title, *Ieschua ben Pandira* and, under it, *Isaac Loria*. It represents, or so it seems to us, the next step of Luria's ascent towards divine truth. Here he no more denies his inner self, but he has 'become the being he is within himself' and his 'soul has turned into pure light'<sup>39</sup> - magic having just been a step in his spiritual evolution. The power it used to give him was mere illusion, and a dangerous one. The « magical star » with five branches which closes the poem becomes, in another poem, the one which shows in its center the name of God :

There are five Masters in my soul  
In five points I arise  
From the star that shines quietly for me  
And shows in its center the holy sign-  
The letter that brings us from heaven  
The initial of God's name.'<sup>40</sup>

Written the same year (probably 1934), another of Pessoa's poems refers to the 'inner Name of God' that can be found 'under the silence of the skies'.<sup>41</sup> However, the way leading to this

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<sup>38</sup> Fernando PESSOA, *Poesia Mágica, Profética e Espiritual*, Lisboa, Lencastre, 1989, p.51-53. In another poem, dated 1933, we find something very similar : 'I laid down, gloomy and tired, / The weapons of magic among / The holy books with which I had such tie / That gives soul Strength and Vision'. (*Ibid*, p.45).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, p.53, 54.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, p.60.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, p.63.

revelation is still full of darkness : ‘Everything seems dark to me, even if skillfully / The shadowy ways are lit up for me / By the ten divine Kabbalah lights’<sup>42</sup>.

It is undeniable, as we can see, that references to Kabbalah are rather frequent in Pessoa’s poetry and prose. One of his innumerable notes, written in 1917, points out to the uninterrupted influence of Kabbalah in the different esoteric currents :

Parallel to the official christian doctrine, with its different mystic, ascetic, and magical trends, we note, coming to the surface from time to time, a current that certainly has its origin in Gnosis (i.e., the result from joining together Jewish Kabbalah and neoplatonism) and appears to us under the form of the Malt Knights, or the Templars, or even disappears to return in Rosicrucianism, finally coming to the surface in Freemasonry. Masons descend, following a never broken tradition, from the esoteric minds that made up Gnosis. Masonic formulas and rituals are clearly Jewish ; the occult substratum of these rituals is undoubtedly gnostic<sup>43</sup>.

One of the elements Pessoa criticizes in the XVIIth century rosicrucian Robert Fludd (1574-1637), is what he calls his ‘going back to mere Kabbalah, [...] and to those oriental principles in which Kabbalah finds its roots’. In a text written in English, he insists in this idea : ‘That Fludd is a Kabbalist cannot be doubted, but that the *Fama* or the *Confessio* express or imply

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, p.47.

<sup>43</sup> Fernando PESSOA, *Páginas Intimas...*, *op.cit.*, p.252.

Kabbalism can certainly be doubted<sup>44</sup>. A number of references can also be found in Pessoa to someone almost contemporary of Fludd, Henry More (1614-1687), <sup>45</sup>whose main work, entitled *Conjectura Cabbalistica*, shows well enough what his spiritual interests were. He was a member of the Cambridge Platonists but, strangely enough, is referred to by Pessoa as being a Rosicrucian, an assertion the works we have consulted do not confirm.<sup>46</sup>

The interest Pessoa took on Rosicrucianism, which we must not overlook if we want to have an accurate view of his works, but that we cannot treat here,<sup>47</sup> is to be connected to his English cultural background. We will not refer again to those English writers he was familiar with and who had some link with Rosicrucianism. But we will just mention once more the *Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in the Outer*, to which a certain number of those writers belonged, because its degrees, corresponding to the ten *Sephiroth* of Kabbalah, appear in a note written by Pessoa, where they are applied to what he called the Portuguese Order of Christ.<sup>48</sup> No document ever attested the existence of this Order in Pessoa's time, and we have good reasons to believe it just came out from his imagination. But we may presume that the influence of Aleister Crowley, Pessoa had met in 1930, in Lisbon, as we have already mentioned, and who was a member of the Golden Dawn, as well as of the O.T.O. (*Ordo Templi Orientis*), besides being the founder of the *Astrum Argentinum*, was decisive in this matter.

Thus, we have some grounds to affirm, at the end of this brief excursion into the realm of Fernando Pessoa's works, that Kabbalah is a recurrent and fundamental reference in those

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<sup>44</sup> Fernando PESSOA, *Rosea Cruz*, Lisboa, Lencastre, 1989, p.52, 104.

<sup>45</sup> See Ana Maria BINET, *op.cit.*, p.562-565.

<sup>46</sup> See about Henry More and Robert Fludd the work by Frances YATES, *Giordano Bruno and the hermetic tradition*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1964.

<sup>47</sup> See Ana Maria BINET, *op.cit.*, p.538-571.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, p.565-566.

works and that his interest for the part Kabbalah played in western esotericism never failed, as he himself declares in a biographical note, written in 1935, a few months before dying :  
 ‘Religious position : Gnostic Christian, and consequently absolutely opposed to all organized Churches, and, above all, the Roman Church. Faithful [...] to the Christian Secret Tradition, which is intimately linked to the Jewish Secret Tradition (the Holy Kabbalah) and with the occult essence of Freemasonry’<sup>49</sup>.

To conclude, we may say that, like some of the great kabbalists whose works he admired, Fernando Pessoa often came too close to the abyss, sometimes at the risk of his mental integrity. Nevertheless, he never abandoned his attempts to discover what lies behind reality and to perceive the Light hiding in the heart of Darkness. For him, the quest for God always remained one of the most important, inspiring and noblest activities of the human mind. In fact, we hope to have persuaded you that- and here we shall quote the great mexican writer Octávio Paz – ‘Pessoa’s works are a step towards the unknown’<sup>50</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> Fernando PESSOA, *Obra Poética e em Prosa*, vol. III, *op.cit.*, p.1428.

<sup>50</sup> Octávio PAZ, *O Desconhecido de Si Mesmo*, [s.l.], Iniciativas Editoriais, 1980, p.38.

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