

Fernando Pessoa

The Portuguese «Sensationists»

A Portuguese once said to me that the worst thing about Portugal was nobody knowing anything about it not even the Portuguese. The phrase, which is no truer nor falsier than such phrases usually are, is singularly right in respect to that curious Portuguese literary movement which its authors have called Sensationism.

Cubism, futurism and other lesser isms have become well-known and far-talked, because they have originated in the admitted centres of European culture. Sensationism, which is far more interesting, a far more original and a far more attractive movement than those, remains unknown because it was born far from those centres.

It is, of course, a younger movement than cubism or futurism. Its authors have never tried to make it far-known. But it is due to them to give the movement that publicity they seem, if not to scorn, hardly to desire.

The Sensationists are, first of all, Decadents They are the direct descendants of the Decadent and Symbolist movements. They claim and preach «absolute indifference to humanity, to religion and to fatherland». They do more and go as far sometimes as to assert that aversion. One of the Sensationists nearly got himself lynched by writing to a Lisbon evening paper an insolent letter congratulating himself with the fact that Afonso Costa — the most popular Portuguese politician — had fallen off a tramcar and was at the doors of death. There is no reason to assert that any real malevolence lies at the back of statements of this kind; probably they are simply made «to irritate the native» (as the Portuguese say).

1916?

Páginas Íntimas e de Auto-Interpretação. Fernando Pessoa. (Textos estabelecidos e prefaciados por Georg Rudolf Lind e Jacinto do Prado Coelho.) Lisboa: Ática, 1966: 202.