

Álvaro de Campos

## **Sensationism began with the friendship between Fernando Pessoa...**

Sensationism began with the friendship between Fernando Pessoa and Mário de Sá-Carneiro. It is probably difficult to separate the part each of them had in the origin of the movement, and certainly quite useless to determine it. The fact is they built up the beginnings between them.

But each Sensationist worth mentioning is a separate personality, and they have naturally all interacted.

Fernando Pessoa and Mário de Sá-Carneiro stand nearest to the symbolists. Álvaro de Campos and Almada-Negreiros are the nearest to the more modern style of feeling and writing. The others are intermediate.

Fernando Pessoa suffers from classical culture.

No sensationist has gone higher than Sá-Carneiro in the expression of what may be called, in sensationism, coloured feelings. His imagination — one of the very finest in modern literature, for he outdid Poe in the reasoning-tale, in *The Strange Death of Professor Antena* — rioted among the elements given it by the senses and his colour-sense is one of the intensest ones in literary men.

Fernando Pessoa is more purely intellectual; his power lies more in the intellectual analysis of feeling and emotion, which he has carried to a perfection which renders us almost breathless. Of his static Drama *The Sailor* a reader once said: «It makes the exterior world quite unreal», and it does. No more remote thing exists in literature. Maeterlinck's best nebulosity and subtlety is coarse and carnal by comparison.

José de Almada-Negreiros is more spontaneous and rapid, but he is none the less a man of genius. He is younger than the others, not only in age, but in spontaneity and effervescence. His is a very distinct personality, and the wonder is how he came about it so early

Luiz de Montalvor is the nearest to the symbolists. He is very little removed, in point of style and spiritual direction, from Mallarmé, who, it is not difficult to guess, must be his favourite poet. But there are clear sensationist elements in his poetry, things entirely out; of Mallarmé, more intellectually deeper, more heartfelt in the brain, to speak quite sensationistically.

How far more interesting than the cubists and the futurists!

I never wished to know personally any of the sensationists. Being persuaded that the best knowledge is impersonal.

Álvaro de Campos is excellently defined as a Walt Whitman with a Greek poet inside. He has all the power of intellectual, emotional and physical sensation that characterised Whitman. But he has the precisely opposite trait — a Power of construction and orderly development of a poem that no poet since Milton has attained. Álvaro de Campos' *Triumphal Ode*, which is written in the whitmanesque absence of stanza and rhyme (and regularity) has a construction and an orderly development which stultifies the perfection that *Lycidas*, for instance, can claim in this particular. The *Naval Ode*, which covers no less than 22 pages of *Orpheu*, is a very marvel of organisation. No German regiment ever had the inner discipline which underlies that composition, which, from its typographical aspect, might almost be considered as a specimen of futurist carelessness. The same considerations apply to the magnificent *Salutation to Walt Whitman* in the third *Orpheu*.

The same considerations might almost apply to José de Almada-Negreiros: if he were not less disciplined and more (...)

The *Scene of Hatred* written by «J[osé de Almada-Negreiros], sensationist poet and Narcissus of Egypt» (as he calls himself) (...)

He is said to have many unprinted works and some unprintable ones.

The sensationist who has published most is Mário de Sá-Carneiro. He was born in May 1890 and committed suicide in Paris on the 26th April 1916. At the time the French papers called him, of course, a Futurist, though, and because, he was none.

His chief strength is in the body of his tales, but their length precludes their inclusion in this anthology.

But the bad point about these classics is that, even when they are classics, they are not Portuguese. Any man of genius — When genius is concerned — could have done that out of Portugal; so there was no use in doing it in Portuguese. We cannot admit a man writing in his native language unless he has something to say which only a man speaking that language could say. The great point about Shakespeare is that he could not but be English. That is why he wrote in English and was born in England. A thing that can just as well be said in one language as in another had better not be said at all. It is only new on the surface. (?)

The Portuguese Sensationists are original and interesting because, being strictly Portuguese, they are cosmopolitan and universal. The Portuguese temperament is universal: that is its magnificent superiority. The one great act of Portuguese history — that long, cautious, scientific period of the Discoveries — is the one great cosmopolitan act in history. The whole people stamp themselves there. An original, typically Portuguese literature cannot be Portuguese, because the typical Portuguese are never Portuguese. There is something American, with the noise left out and the quotidian omitted, in the intellectual temper of this people. No people seizes so readily on novelties. No people depersonalises so magnificently. That weakness is its great strength. That temperamental non-regionalism is its unused might. That indefiniteness of soul is what makes them definite.

Because the great fact about the Portuguese is that they are the most civilised people in Europe. They are born civilised, because they are born acceptors of all. They have nothing of what the old psychiatrists used to call misoneism, meaning only hatred of things new; they have a positive love of novelty and change. They have no stable elements, as the French have, who only make revolutions for export. The Portuguese are always making revolutions. When a Portuguese goes to bed he makes a revolution, because the Portuguese who wakes up the next day is quite different. He is precisely a day older, quite distinctly a day older. Other people wake up every morning yesterday. Tomorrow is always several years away. Not so this quite strange people. They go so quick that they leave everything undone, including going quick. Nothing is less idle than a Portuguese. The only idle part of the nation is the working part of it. Hence their lack of evident progress.

As for modern Portuguese literature, the best thing is to go round the corner when it comes. It is the echo of an echo of an echo of something which was not worth saying. When it is not pure dirt, as in Abel Botelho's novels, it ought to be dirt, at least to be something, as in the novels and poems of all the other authors.

All classic Portuguese literature hardly rises to the interesting; it hardly rises to the classic. Putting aside a few things in Camoens, which are noble, several things of Anthero de Quental, which are great, one or two poems of Junqueiro, which are worth reading, if only to find how far he can educate himself out of having educated himself into Hugo, one poem of Teixeira de Pascoaes who has spent the rest of his literary life in apologising in bad poetry for having written one of the very greatest love poems in the world — if this is excepted, and

some minor things which are exceptions by their very being minor things, the sum and whole of Portuguese literature is hardly literature and scarcely ever Portuguese. It is Provençal, Italian, Spanish and French, occasionally English, in some people, like Garrett, who knew enough French to read bad French translations of inferior English poems and go right when they go wrong on that. Portuguese literature has some good prose; Vieira is a master anywhere, though he preached. It is also said he is a guide to the language, but that can be excused, because he is a guide to Machiavelli through his Jesuit nature. There are fine things in the early chroniclers, but they came before Portugal awoke to find itself missing all over the world, with all the oceans open to the people who hadn't dared to go there first.

One or two modern poets climb up to the interesting, but they are tired when they reach it, and sleep out the rest of their literary lives. Thus Pascoaes, who wrote an «Elegy» which stands above Browning's *Last Ride Together* as a metaphysical love poem, and after that a number of poems which stand below anything anybody likes to propose, and are an elegy on the inspiration of Pascoaes.

There are a lot of local great poets who suffer from not having been anything in a former incarnation, and acting on an amnesia of that. Indian astrologers say that a child cannot be born except at certain moments of the world-breath. These poets and prose-writers got advantage of the intervals and filled them all up. You could hardly do that out of Portugal, but you can do it badly in Portugal. (*var*: You can do that out of Portugal, but you can't do it quite so well as where Affonso Costa is a statesman and several other Costas people).

There are only two interesting things in Portugal — the landscape and *Orpheu*. All the packing in between is used-up rotten straw. It has served in outer Europe and comes to an end in between the two interesting things in Portugal. It sometimes spoils the landscape by putting Portuguese people on it. But it cannot spoil *Orpheu*, because that is Portugal-proof.

I had been a day and a half in Portugal when I noticed the landscape. It took me a year and a half to notice *Orpheu*. It is true I landed in Portugal from England at the same time as *Orpheu* from Olympus. But that does not matter and is only a God-sent coincidence, which I accept and am thankful for.

If there were any instinct of the sensible in modern writing, I would begin with the landscape and finish up with *Orpheu*. But, God be thanked, there is no instinct «of the sensible in modern writing, so I leave the landscape and begin and end with *Orpheu*. The landscape is there all the time and can be looked

at by those who choose and can go. *Orpheu* is there but it can hardly be read by all. At best it can be read by very few. But it is worth reading. It is worth learning Portuguese to read it. Not that there is any Goethe or Shakespeare in it. But there is enough to compensate for there being no Goethe nor Shakespeare. *Orpheu* is the sum and synthesis of all modern literary movements; that is why it is more worthy of being written about than the landscape which is only the absence of the people who live in it.

*Orpheu* is a quarterly review of which, though it began a year and a half ago, only three numbers have appeared. That means nothing except that it means nothing. It has about eighty pages to each number and not very many collaborators covering those eighty pages. Some run through the three numbers, and others alternate. They are extraordinarily varied considering their small number and the fact that they are all very modern. Each number adds a new interest to this marvellous synthetic movement. I am waiting for the fourth number with absolute anguish. It may be silly, though it is true to say there is much more unexpectedness and interest in *Orpheu* than there is in the present War.

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: 140.

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