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Fernando Pessoa and the Portuguese Modernist Heritage: a Sociocultural Analysis

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Abstract

The early twentieth century was a tumultuous time for Portuguese society. Shortly before World War I began, the Portuguese monarchy fell and gave way to the First Republic on October 5, 1910. Collectively, the 1890 British ultimatum to Portugal—which forced Portugal to retreat from its claimed colonial African territories—the fall of the monarchy, and the country's participation in the First World War set the framework for the post-romantic period. The cultural elite of the time initiated movements such as the Portuguese Renaissance in defense of a nation open to Europe yet still marked by a desire to return to its origins. In this context, Fernando António Nogueira Pessoa and his friend Mário de Sá-Carneiro emerged as the founders of Portuguese modernism, which they would develop under the concept of *sensacionismo* (sensationism). Fernando Pessoa and Mário de Sá-Carneiro, along with Almada Negreiros are some of the major representatives of modernism in painting and literature in Portuguese-speaking countries. In this article, we analyze the impact of modernism in Portugal at the beginning of the twentieth century and the role played by the work of Fernando Pessoa in the sociocultural context of that Portuguese era.

Keywords: Modernism, Fernando Pessoa, Portugal, cultural studies

The poet Fernando Pessoa was a driving force behind the birth of Portuguese modernism in the field of literature. He was also one of the country's most distinguished personalities, defending modernist principles in a country that in 1926 was fast moving towards Oliveira Salazar's fascism. Pessoa was born in Lisbon in 1888 and died in 1935. He is the most well-known Portuguese poet in the world. In 1896, Pessoa went to South Africa with his family and was educated there according to English standards. His first poems were written in English. Pessoa returned to Lisbon in 1905, where he commenced writing poetry and prose in Portuguese, English, and French. In his writing, he adopted multiple pseudonyms and created several alter egos. One of the most relevant works produced under his birth name is also one of the most well-known in Portugal: a book of verse published in Pessoa's native Portuguese entitled *Message (Mensagem)*.¹

Pessoa was one of the founders of Portuguese modernism, along with Mário de Sá-Carneiro and Almada Negreiros. These individuals were also some of the primary representatives of European modernism and its growth worldwide. This essay aims to undertake a sociocultural analysis of Pessoa's modernist work in the early twentieth century in a Portuguese socio-cultural context. We will research some concepts about the modernist movement in the world and its repercussions in Portugal, including the following guiding questions: What was modernism and what did its founders seek? What did modernism mean and what did its founders want to achieve with this new ideology? To what extent did this movement respond to the socio-anthropological challenges of the time? What was Pessoa's contribution to modernism in Portugal and in Europe? These are some of the issues analyzed in the first section of this article, "Modernist Movement and Decadentism in Fernando Pessoa." The second part, titled "Modernism and Fernando Pessoa's Sensacionismo: Particularities of the Portuguese Case," focuses on the Portuguese and European contexts. The events that took place in Portugal in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries made it an unlikely epicenter for the emergence of modernism, yet Pessoa, one of modernism's greatest geniuses, was born and raised in this country. From the financial crisis of the late nineteenth century to the English ultimatum rejecting the Portuguese Pink Map of Africa,² there were many events fueling the rebirth of Portuguese nationalist fervor and the concurrent birth of modernist cosmopolitanism.

Modernist Movement and Decadentism in Fernando Pessoa

Modernism emerged in the mid-nineteenth century in the fields of philosophy, literature, and painting. According to the art critic Clement Greenberg (1980), the modernist movement arose from self-criticism provided by Kantian philosophy (Ferreira; Cotrim, 2001). Modernism's founders strongly criticized romantic bourgeois assumptions, advocating a reflection on romantic attitudes and actions. It is a theme that first "appeared locally, in France, from Baudelaire in literature, to Manet in painting, as well as, perhaps, in Flaubert in fictional prose" (Greenberg, 1980) or even in sculpture. According to Sobia Kiran (2012, p. 176), Nietzsche, Freud, and Marx were the most important precursors to modernist thought in the religious, philosophical, psychological, and political fields. Steven Best and Douglas Kellner (1997) emphasize that modernism acquired its foundation in the field of the arts, where "articulated new techniques, artistic styles, and ideologies regarding the function of art and the artist's role in society" brought modernism into focus. By 1850, Charles Baudelaire "[had inaugurated] a new modernist style of poetry, able to capture the particularities of modern life" (Best; Kellner, 1997, p. 126). Like Baudelaire, all the modernist representatives, including Manet and Flaubert, rejected the certainties inherited from romanticism, "they ... distrust the stability and order offered in earlier literary works" (Kiran, 2012, p. 176).

Modernist thought broke with literary conventions. Later, modernist ideas spread to music and architecture as well as dance.

In Portugal, modernism manifested itself firstly through art, in a painting exhibition held in “Lisbon in 1911 by painters who [had] completed studies in Paris . . . [and, in this context, raised] a voice that. . . [signified] a new artistic generation” (França, 2004, p. 11). These painters, representing impressionist painting, can be considered the forerunners of Portuguese modernism. Authors such as Arthur Rimbaud (2002) [1873], who argued that art should be absolutely modern, and the poet Ezra Pound, who insisted that artists should be in a state of permanent innovation (North, 2013), along with Salvador Dalí, with his *La desintegración del tiempo*, developed the ideology of modernist thinking internationally. The foundations of the modernist movement were based on the ideas of these artistic innovators. The defense of innovation and novelty, the appreciation of contemporary themes, the rejection of tradition, and the sense of the end of the world and of time were the modernist hallmarks, accompanying the rejection of old romantic aesthetic forms. A break from the past is a sign of modernism; the idea was that human activity should recreate itself all over again, from a *tabula rasa*—a blank slate—in the arts, in literature, and in architecture. In the words of Best and Kellner (1997, p. 126), this denial of the old and creation of the new results in a continuous originality, combined with the concept of “creative destruction” in all walks of life. As explained by Sobia Kiran (2012, p. 176), the people “are provoked to think and decide for themselves. They are expected to reconstruct their moralities.” They should be autonomous, able to create their own life projects, and build the paths of their lives, *per se*.

However, the apparent break from the past advocated by modernism co-existed with the search for past principles, “combining the praise of the ‘*tabula rasa*’ with the commendation of legitimate tradition, which expressed ‘the superpersonal experience of consecutive generations’” (Brites, 2009, p. 35), all of this within a framework in which the memory is constantly renewing itself. As demonstrated by Connerton (1999), regarding the new world that emerged from the French Revolution, even a society that must start from ground zero, can never eradicate the memory of what existed before. In this way, the past will always be the starting point for the break with a particular historical social order. In the context of the French Revolution, both the regicide as well as the change in traditions and customs that resulted from the revolution implied social practices indicative of a rupture with the past, with the past serving as a “reference of social memories” (Connerton, 1999, p. 15). The past plays a critical role in rebirth. Indeed, without old absolutist regimes, for example, there might never have been revolution and democracy; without monarchy, we might never have known what a republic would be in the modern conception of the term. Indeed, without the past, would we recognize the society in which we live? Would the world have taken another course?

Fernando Pessoa is a paradigmatic case of the bridge that memory creates between the present and the past. On one hand, Pessoa refused the poet’s role as a social mediator, as was desired by romantic paternalism; on the other hand, he advocated vociferously for the advance of modernist thinking. As he asserts in his book *Mensagem*, “It is time to fulfil Portugal.” Pessoa “intend[ed] to take on the intervening function of the artist, in the framework of a dialogue with history The poet remembers the key role of poetry in the establishment [as] a link between past and future, not promoting a regressive vision of history—going to the nostalgic fatalism and to the ‘integralist statism’—nor a radicalism centered on the pure utopia of a future which is never possible in the present” (Júdice, 1996, p. 333).

Decadentism was an artistic, philosophical, and literary movement that began in France in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, spreading throughout Europe during this period. The magazine *Le Décadent*, founded in 1886 by Anatole Baju, was the main

means of communicating the movement's ideas. Decadentism was framed in a time marked by the feeling of crisis, as a consequence of the failure of the technological and scientific progress promised by the bourgeois model—a model that was characterized by moral, ethical, and social Puritan principles, such as the patriarchal family of the good father or the role of women as a good wife, good mother, and good housewife, and by a teleological vision of the future towards progress.

In the transition from the nineteenth century to the twentieth century, people witnessed the metamorphosis of time and the contradictions of scientific and industrial progress, which did not lead to the promised happiness of the industrial age. It was a world marked by “degeneration, negativism, and pessimism, the cause and consequence of an intense sense of existential bewilderment” (Bousbaa, 2013). This social and cultural context led to the emergence of a young generation of French intellectuals, including Paul Verlaine, who gave meaning to the expression in *Je suis l'empire à la fin de la decadence* (I am the Empire at the end of the decadence). Verlaine proposed the fragmentation of the subject, (instead of its unity) and subjectivity (instead of the positivist objectivity). Decadentism in literature can be seen as a foreword to modernism, rejecting all the traditional forms of art as well as the conservatism reflected in realism. Realism, while criticizing the bourgeois values and proposing solutions to this disturbance, does no more than reaffirm these values (Gomes, 2009). Barcellos (2007) notes,

The realistic novels and short stories reaffirm all of romanticism's values: importance of the nuclear family, work ethics, nationalism, individualism, freedom, honesty, and respectability, etc. Realism is, in fact, a complaint and a protest against the corruption of these values, in a society that pretends to accept them but that reduces them, in practice, to a mere game of appearances and interests. The great purpose of Realism is, in a sense, the accusation of hypocrisy, which implies presenting the most selfish and petty interests under the guise of noble and reputable values. For this purpose, the realist authors aimed to contribute to the improvement of bourgeois society. Their literature was intended to be an instrument for the enlightenment of consciences with the purpose of changing and improving many aspects of social, political and economic life, which they considered inappropriate. Realist novels and short stories call for the reform in education, for the promotion of women, social justice, and the improvement of laws and institutions, etc. (pp. 83-84)

The decadent movement had a real influence on Fernando Pessoa's life and work. The rejection of unity and the integrity of the subject, namely the rejection of the bourgeoisie's moral values, led the decadent representatives to the acquisition of a certain “awareness of Self-fragmentation, because they were becoming aware of the multiplicity of identities as a phenomenon inherent to the human condition” (Gomes, 2009, p. 3). The pseudonyms and the alter egos in Pessoa's work reveal his multiple and fragmented personalities, in accordance with the decadent/modernist movement's principles. In a letter sent to his friend Adolfo Casais Monteiro regarding the genesis of the pseudonyms, dated January 13th 1935, Pessoa states, “The origin of my mental pseudonyms is in my constant organic tendency towards depersonalization and simulation” (Carta a Adolfo Casais Monteiro, de 13 de Janeiro de 1935).

The variety of the author's alter egos reveals a man who seems lost in time and space, confronted with the collapse of the bourgeoisie's established truths. God's death, as well as the lack of belief in a society based on the ethical, moral, and social values of the bourgeoisie, causes this apparent disorientation of the modernist representatives. These ideas are well reflected in *O Livro do Desassossego* (*The Book of Unrest*), when Pessoa refers to “not knowing how to believe in God, and not being able to believe in a sum of animals (Humanity).” He continues, saying, “I was, like others on the edge of the people, in that

distance from everything that is commonly called Decay. Decadence is the total loss of unconsciousness because unconsciousness is the foundation of life. The heart, if it could think, would stop” (Pessoa, 2000, p. 11). However, this assertion represents no more than Pessoa and other modernist artists’ complete disregard for the conventions and absolute truths set forth by the time but not practiced by the dominant social class. Eduardo Lourenço points out that our lyric poetry has always been based on temporality and has always told of “dead leaves and lovers more dead than they are alive.” He continues:

[In] classical and romantic lyric poetry, the individual, the poet, and all of those who read his poetry, travelled in the boat of time to a safe port. God, or someone on his behalf, was waiting for us in order to give meaning to the trip. Pessoa’s journey, and our trip in Pessoa is, from the beginning, the trip of somebody who is definitely lost... We are not in Time but we are the Time. But if the Time is, we are not, or we are as Pessoa, who struggled to imagine what he would be if he were Caeiro, Reis, or Campos. No poet of modernity expressed the doom of the direction of our destination in the modern world as well as Pessoa, and this would be enough for the author of “Tabacaria” to become not only the myth that he is for us, but also one of the key references of the contemporary culture. ... [T]he modern man contributed to this feeling of extreme and absurd solitude that gradually emerged through the process of isolation and inhumanity of the current civilization (Lourenço, 2008).

The theme of duality, “highlighting the idea of subject fragmentation,” was one of the most explored ideas within European modernism” (Gomes, 2009, p. 10). These multiple identities challenge and question the unique and immutable conception of an indivisible identity, as was established and determined by the bourgeoisie after the French Revolution. In terms of the social classification of time, modernist authors were ahead of their time. As we can observe in *Ultimatum*, a poem published by Pessoa under the pseudonym of Álvaro de Campos, the poet exposes, with regard to art, the “abolition of the dogma of artistic individuality,” meaning that “the greatest artist will be the least defined himself, and one who is able to write in more genres with more contradictions and dissimilarities.” He proclaimed, “No artist should have only one personality. Every artist should have several personalities, organizing each of them by a reunited meeting of similar states of soul, thus dissipating the gross fiction [that] the artist is just one and indivisible” (Pessoa, 1917, p. 30).

As we have seen, bourgeois ethics advocated the person as a whole being, and art treated as a social project, in which the artist should be available to contribute to social progress. Contrary to this belief, Fernando Pessoa, like other modernists, who were aware of bourgeois hypocrisy—in which the “heralded progress benefited [only] a caste of privileged people” (Mucci, 1994)—proposed the creation of art without any social purpose. In the same way, Charles Baudelaire shocked the great romantic writers of the period, such as Victor Hugo and George Sand, by rejecting social literature that adhered to romantic ideas. According to Baudelaire, art should have value in and of itself; art should be valued as art, *per se*, and that is the only way in which it can be beautiful, as referenced by his friend Théophile Gautier (Gomes, 2009, p. 5). Sharing the modernist ideas of his time, Fernando Pessoa states that “any artist who gives to his art an extra-artistic significance is infamous” (Pessoa, 1966 [1916], p. 158).

The work of Fernando Pessoa is paradigmatic in relation to the disruptions of bourgeois convention. In *O Livro do Desassossego* (*The Book of Unrest*), the poet evokes his pessimism towards the world of inherited certainties. The author frees himself from these certainties, which leads him into “a terrible tension between the agony of a self, and the super-existence of a self, multiplied in masks” (Cerqueira, 2000, p. 68). The *Livro do Desassossego* brings together a series of texts that Pessoa wrote under the pseudonym of Bernardo Soares. Having been published only in 1982, the work illustrates some of the purest

modernist influences in the poet's repertoire. In the book, the anguish of his being is very clear, as can be seen in text number 23, entitled *Absurdo (Absurd)*. The poet exclaims, "Let us become sphinxes, even if false, until we reach the point where we no longer know who we are. Because, for the rest, we are sphinxes and we do not know what we really are. The only way to agree with life is to be at odds with ourselves. The absurd is divine" (Pessoa, 2000, p. 22).

Modernism and Fernando Pessoa's *Sensacionismo*: Particularities of the Portuguese Case

As in the rest of Europe, the emergence of decadentism and modernism in Portugal occurred in the second half of the nineteenth century and extended until the 1960s and 1970s, in the fields of art, literature, architecture, and others. Although one of modernism's most "striking features [is] its wide geographical spread," its multi-nationality, "each of the contributing countries has its own cultural inheritance, its own social and political tensions, which impose distinctively national emphases upon modernism and leave any account which relies on a single national perspective misleadingly partial" (Bradbury & McFarlane, 1991, p. 95). In the case of Portugal, the beginning of modernism coincided with a period of a serious economic and political crisis, culminating with the 1890 delivery of the English ultimatum in response to Portugal's claims to African colonial territories, outlined on a map referred to as the Map de Cor-Rosa (the Pink Map). On this map, Portugal sought the unification of its territories between Angola and Mozambique, territory that was also claimed by the British Empire. The ultimatum forced the retreat of Portugal and wounded the monarchy irrecoverably. Indeed, Portuguese modernism appeared within a national framework that was shaken by the English threat and by the fall of the monarchy and the consequent emergence of the Portuguese republic in 1910. Before the English threat, notions of homeland, nation, and nationalism, the central themes of romanticism, were reborn with strength in Portuguese intellectual circles, in a golden age of modernism throughout Western Europe.

It is in this context that the Portuguese Renaissance Cultural Movement emerges in Oporto, in 1911, whose emblematic journal was *A Águia*, a scientific and literary magazine published between 1910 and 1932. Teixeira de Pascoaes and Raul Proença organized the first meetings, held in the city of Oporto, which gave rise to the modernist thought movement and its magazine. According to Américo Monteiro (1997), these meetings were inspired by *saudosismo (nostalgism)*, which defended the pure Portuguese soul, which they referred to as "lusitanismo," implying the absence of foreign contamination (and invoking the notion of a Portuguese "race," as it was called, in a laudatory manner). The *saudosismo*, proposed by Teixeira Pascoaes in the first meetings, inspired the "Portuguese Renaissance movement, which [deepened] the mystical, metaphysical, and gnoseological concept of longing, making it the cornerstone of his history theory and his aesthetic ideals" (Oliveira, 2010, p. 46). For Teixeira de Pascoaes, *saudosismo* was "the cult of the Motherland soul or of longing, revealed in Pessoa, which is divine and guides our literary, artistic, religious, philosophical, and even social activities" (Pascoaes, 2007, p. 134).

In the second phase of the foundation of the Portuguese Renaissance movement, the meetings were held in Lisbon, having António Sérgio as one of its main mentors. This represented a certain shift in perspectives. Defending the nation's moral progress and nationalist values, it was, however, intended that this movement be a civic intervention platform by entering Portugal in the modern Western world, in order to accompany its economic, social, and cultural dynamics (Monteiro, 1997). In this sense, António Sérgio explained,

We founded the Renaissance in the belief, more or less consciously, that the homeland requires a constructive revolution and that the most effective way of trying is not based on the ordinary processes of policy but rather on a wide educational action, carried out by the foundation and maintenance of pre-schools and school-workshops, popular universities, magazines, conferences, discussions.... In this spiritual brotherhood, which aims to enlighten the people through a moral and educational activity, people from all social classes are now included, not only Portuguese, but also Brazilians. (Sérgio, 1914, p. 21)

The Portuguese Renaissance deeply marked the “cultural and literary Portuguese scene, between the implementation of the Portuguese republic and the 1930s, when the first University of Porto School of Arts was closed”³ (Samuel, 2003). As such, the impact of the modernist movement and its magazine was great on society at the time, making it an important influence in the affirmation of Portuguese nationalism. As quoted by Luís Reis Torgal:

The *Águia* magazine, belonging to the Portuguese Renaissance Movement, is indicative of this trend for the formation of a national Portuguese culture, with personalities like Leonardo Coimbra, a nostalgic philosopher and republican... [and] Jaime Cortesão, a republican who would become an intellectual opponent to the [short-lived 1932-1933] Portuguese dictatorial regime ... [under] Salazar, named ‘Estado Novo.’ Other personalities such as Afonso Lopes Vieira, a famous Portuguese poet, a monarchist and traditionalist, also belonged to the movement In the meantime, a group of intellectuals who defended regionalism and the nationalist culture was founded, including Augusto Gil, António Correia de Oliveira, and Raul Lino. (Torgal 2004, p. 1088)

In early twentieth century Portugal, there were two cultural and intellectual movements, the ideas of which would be greatly challenged by Pessoa and other modernist poets like Mário de Sá-Carneiro and the painter and poet José de Almada Negreiros. On one hand, the Portuguese Renaissance proposed the opening of Portugal to the modernized and cosmopolitan Europe; on the other hand, it did not fail to recognize two worlds within Portugal: the agrarian or provincial and the urban. At the same time, it criticized both the urban and the cosmopolitan country, which was defended by modernism, and the closed and rural country, which adhered to Lusitanian fundamentalism. From an anthropological point of view, Pessoa’s work and his intervention in Portuguese modernism goes against the idiosyncrasy of Portuguese culture and society of the time. In fact, the idealization of the Portuguese national culture was based on concepts like tradition and cultural roots, dreaming of the past Portuguese era of discovery.

It is in this context that Portuguese modernism is outlined, the ideas of which are disseminated in one of the most remarkable modernist magazines of the time: *Orpheu* magazine. *Orpheu* was first published in Portugal and in Brazil in the year 1915 and was founded by Pessoa, Luís de Montalvor, and Mário de Sá-Carneiro. The magazine’s contributors intended to create and disseminate a cosmopolitan art and culture, using the magazine for this purpose. Although only two issues of the *Orpheu* were published, this magazine can be considered

the most significant avant-garde initiative of those years and will affirm, within the framework of Portuguese literature, the most important names and how much influence they will exert the following generations: Mário de Sá-Carneiro, Fernando Pessoa e Almada Negreiros.... No matter that the magazine does not present essentially avant-garde content, what matters is the impact that it will bring through the contribution of Sá-Carneiro and Pessoa.⁴ The latter more notably, because he was

the creator and inventor of new and original poetic forms: Paulism, intersectionism and sensationism. (D'Alge, 1989, p. 22)

From the magazine *Orpheu*, a group of intellectuals, mainly painters and writers such as Almada Negreiros, Mário de Sá-Carneiro, Amadeo de Souza-Cardoso, and Santa Rita Pintor constituted a core group of modernists called “Geração d’Orpheu” (Orpheu’s Generation). The introduction of modernist ideas in Portugal, then in force throughout Europe, was made by this group of intellectuals.

Futurism, Intersectionism, and Sensationism

Portuguese modernism began with the antinaturalist humorism,⁵ progressing from there to both futurism, and sensationism. Futurism was an artistic and social movement originating in Italy in the early 20th century emphasizing speed and technology and inventions such as the car, the airplane, and the industrial city. Futurism was introduced in Portugal by the painter Guilherme de Santa Rita in the early twentieth century, having been entrusted by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti to bring his texts to Portugal (D’Alge, 1989). The Portuguese futurists, both painters and literati, held conferences, among other events and published a single edition of the *Portugal Futurist*, having in mind the intention of disseminating Marinetti’s texts in the country.⁶ Mário de Sá-Carneiro⁷ referred to two of Pessoa’s poems in particular as “futurism’s masterpiece”⁸ (França, 2014). The two poems were both published in the second issue of *Orpheu* magazine, in 1915, the first entitled *Chuva Oblíqua* (“Oblique Rain”), published under Pessoa’s own name, and the second, *Ode Marítima* (“Maritime Ode”) published under the pseudonym Álvaro de Campos. *Chuva Oblíqua*, in particular, is interesting for its analysis of intersectionism, the avant-garde literary movement initiated in Portugal by Pessoa that would come to converge in the *sensacionismo* (sensationism) an idea that we will develop later in this article. Heitor Teixeira (1973) reveals how Pessoa projects his *being* into a poem composed of six parts. The first part in particular, consisting of four stanzas, reveals a being, or “one and double, double and multiple spirit, pulverized by recollection, succession, and insertion of visual, auditory, and tactile images (‘sensations,’ Pessoa would say)” (p. 98). Teixeira synthesizes the work (1973, p. 100), after detailed analysis of *Chuva Oblíqua* as follows: “*Interseccionism*, [the first path to Pessoa’s modernism], in Pessoa is much more than a poem or a project of poetry; intersections are fundamentally his pseudonyms, the acute awareness...that it was possible and necessary, not to split into doubles, as in *Chuva Oblíqua*, but rather to focus on multiple plans that have been deployed on other levels” simultaneously (p. 100).

The literary analysis and the epitome of Pessoa’s “Futurist,” which Mário de Sá-Carneiro attributed to *Ode Triunfal* (*Triunfal Ode*), which Pessoa also published in 1915 in *Orpheu*, also under the pseudonym of Álvaro de Campos, is widely criticized by Eduardo Lourenço (1981) and by Irene Santos (2007). However, it is not so devoid of meaning according to Gianluca Miraglia (1917), for whom “the enthusiasm with which Mário de Sá-Carneiro reacted to the *Ode Triunfal*, if it is philologically restored to the context in which it occurs, it becomes less frightening and disparate than Eduardo Lourenço and Irene Ramalho Santos lead us to believe” (p. 179).

According to José Augusto França (1983), historian, sociologist, and critic of Portuguese art, modernism and its currents of thought did not have the same expression in Portugal as it did in other countries. This opinion is underlined by Carlos D’Alge (1989), for whom there was not a real Portuguese futurism, as advocated by one of its Italian founders, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. In Portugal, there were mainly avant-garde aesthetic movements “parallel to Italian Futurism or perhaps even facets of European Futurism” (D’Alge, 1989, p. 22), but it cannot be denied that “there are analogies between the vanguard movements that

appeared in Europe, from Marinetti's first manifesto of 1909, and the emergence of the [second of the *Orpheu* magazines], in 1915" (D'Alge, 1989, p. 22).

The terms "modernism" and especially "futurism" were quite complex in the fields of art and literature, though it was the avant-garde current of thought of modernism that had perhaps the greatest presence in Portugal. In the Portuguese case, this complexity can be seen in the various denominations and variations that were directly associated with modernism, such as *Paulismo*,⁹ *interseccionismo*¹⁰ and *sensacionismo* (Paulism, intersectionism and sensationism), and including neo-paganism or futurism (Reis, 1999, p. 458), all of which were often disdained and despised by an established cultural elite, as illustrated by the romantic poets Júlio Dantas, as well as Augusto de Castro, Alfredo da Cunha, and Henrique Lopes de Mendonça. In 1915, for example, Júlio Dantas classified the poets of the *Orpheu* group as "paranoid poets," assigning other pernicious adjectives to the so-called Portuguese modernist/futurist poets, as he "labeled them in his usual chronicle of the *Portuguese Illustration*, on April 19, (but without naming them or the magazine, to avoid giving them publicity)" (Barreto, 2015, p. 86). These actions inspired violent reactions on the part of Portuguese modernists, as can be seen in the "Anti-Dantas Manifesto." The manifesto, written by the painter and poet Almada Negreiros in 1915, is the main symbolic reaction against all those who criticized the group of *Orpheu*—that is, against the Portuguese cultural establishment of the time, represented by the emblematic Júlio Dantas. In the manifesto, Almada Negreiros writes, "Enough, enough! A generation that allows itself to be represented by Dantas is a generation that never existed! It is a bunch of indigents, people with no dignity or vision! It's a group of charlatans and sell outs, and it can only give birth below zero! Down with the generation! Dantas, die, die!"¹¹ (Almada-Negreiros, 1915).

In 1913, in response, and in a playful tone, Fernando Pessoa published, in *Teatro: Revista de Crítica*, a text mocking the poets of the old school, Júlio Dantas, and Afonso Lopes Vieira. Accusing Afonso Lopes Vieira of writing children's literature, in *Naufrágio de Bartolomeu* (*Bartolomeu's Shipwreck*), Pessoa writes, "Educated in stupidity by reading the children's works of Mr. Lopes Vieira led to antipatriotism by the inevitable disdain [to which] a book like *Bartolomeu Marinheiro* leads... Because... what... can a nation of [unpatriotic and panophobic] fools [do] but to cease to be a nation?" (Pessoa, 1913a). In 1915, Pessoa laments "the ignorance and incompetence of our critics, the lack of culture and the stupidity of our public, the mental indiscipline and the scientific quackery of our so-called men of science," referring to *Rilhafoles* from Júlio Dantas, who "cannot even be called charlatanism" (Pessoa, 2006).

The birth of sensationism

It is not our intention, neither in this article nor even in a paragraph, to explain the concept of sensationism, so well defined and developed by Pessoa in his many texts, some of which were compiled as late as 1966, such as in the *Páginas Intimas e de Auto-Interpretação* (*Intimate Pages and Self-Interpretation*). We do intend, however, to approach this literary movement, because it was so critical to the particular nature of Portuguese modernism.

In the literary field of the avant-gardes, one of the greatest novelties of Portuguese modernism was the concept of sensationism. Sensationists read and projected the world through feelings and emotions. For them, objective reality does not exist; it only depends on the eyes of those who see it, the moment and the state of mind of the person who observes it; that is, the interpretation or ideas that the artist makes of things. It is not, however, the mere transmission of emotions, but rather the expression of intellectually worked emotions, in which the poet is able to express a sensation in the most appropriate way, before becoming aware of it. In this way, the pseudonyms Alberto Caeiro, Ricardo Reis, and Álvaro de

Campos, correspond precisely to poetic identities distinct from that of Pessoa himself; they constitute his multiple subjective identities, in which the pseudonimic presupposes thinking and feeling as another person would do, implying abstraction and depersonalization. Through his remarkable pseudonym “Cantor-Vidente do Futuro” (Cantor-Seer of the Future), Pessoa proposes a path from futurism towards modernism through a series of laws of poetic creation that will produce a new artist, completely different from the man inherited from romanticism. Pessoa thus declares the disappearance of the “scientific monarchy..., of metaphysical philosophy, and religious sentiment” (França, 1983, p. 24). In one of his most significant and previously mentioned works, *O Livro do Desassossego* (*The Book of Unrest*), the poet reveals his ideas by saying, “I was born at a time when most of the young people had lost their belief in God, for the same reason that their elders had, without knowing why” (Pessoa, 2000, p. 11).

It may be argued that modernism, and even futurism, did not have the same impact in Portugal (France, 1983; D’Alge, 1989; Pizarro, 2009) that they had in other countries due to their scarce number of representatives in Portugal and the limited scope of their message; we underline, however, that the life and the work of three of Portugal’s greatest modernist representatives—the painter Santa Rita, the painter and writer Almada Negreiros, and the poets Fernando Pessoa and Mário de Sá-Carneiro—all contributed directly and critically to the expansion of modernism in Portugal. Even if, as Jerónimo Pizarro (2009) says, “Pessoa was only fleeting and superficially futuristic” (p.78), the poet, influenced by his friend Sá-Carneiro, stood out. He was remarkable for his originality and the way in which his work not only directly contributed to and developed a transnational modernism but also contextualized its modernism within the Portuguese reality, under sensationism. Pessoa projects in his writing, in an intellectualized way, sensationism, at the same time rejecting objectivity in the name of the subjectivity with which it interprets and reads the world that surrounds it. As Pessoa says under the pseudonym of Álvaro de Campos (1994): (1) All art is the overlapping of the Things of our interpretation or idea of them; (2) Real art is to find the exact point of contact between things and our interpretation of things. We can see a square or a blue tree; (3) Thus, with the form a square, sensation not only imposes on the screen of reality a square form but imposes the notion that each thing has a form that is square (Pessoa, 1914 cited in Cunha, 1994, p. 237). By this definition, sensationism emerges as a complex, non-linear literary aesthetic, reflecting a poet who does not defend a singular form of art or literature, framed in a specific and locally determined movement in which sensations overlap with rational thought. From Pessoa’s perspective, cosmopolitan and denationalized art and literature must be able to gather and synthesize all the local and avant-garde aesthetic movements into a kind of *super art*. Indeed, during the creation of the *Orpheu* magazine, Pessoa (1966) refers as one of his objectives as being

to create a cosmopolitan art in time and space.... That is why true modern art has to be maximally denationalized—to accumulate within itself all parts of the world. Only then will it be typically modern. Our art must be one where Asiatic malaise and mysticism, African primitivism, the cosmopolitanism of the Americas, the ultra-exoticism of Oceania, and the decadent machinery of Europe merge, cross, intersect. And this merging spontaneously will result in an *art-of-all-the-arts*, a spontaneously complex inspiration. (p. 113)

The “art-of-all-the-arts,” the purpose of which is to “compress the whole earth, uniting all countries materially and intellectually, is sensationism itself” (Matos, 2007), whose only rule is “to be the synthesis of everything”; this is from all forms of art (Pessoa, 1966, p. 124). Art, free from all conventions, should have no other purpose than to “feel in every way” (Pessoa, 1966, p. 124). For Pessoa, art and literature should have as their purpose an understanding of the world that departs from the subject, the painter or the writer who sees it,

builds it and, above of all, feels it in its own way. As Anderson Matos (2007) points out, Álvaro de Campos synthesizes his ideas in the poem “After All, the Best Way to Travel is to Feel”:

After all, the best way to travel is to feel.
To feel everything in every way.
To feel everything excessively,
For all things are in truth excessive.
And all reality is an excess, a violence
(Pessoa, 1944, p. 300)

Sensationism emerges as the agglutinating concept of the Portuguese modernist movement, which must be based on three principles: “(1) Every object is a personal sensation; (2) All art is the conversion of a sensation into an object; (3) Therefore, all art is the conversion of a sensation into another sensation.” In other words, “to the sensationist, every idea, every feeling expressed, has to be expressed in a different way from that which expresses another” (Pessoa, 1966, pp. 158, 168). The poet must objectify his sensations through words, communicating the value of what he feels to the reader, in order to generate in him the greatest number of new sensations. Thus, in sensationism, the text is conceived as an organized whole, resulting from the collage of several images provoked by the most diverse sensations.

Under the umbrella of *sensacionismo*, Pessoa, in line with modernism’s urban and cosmopolitan thinking, criticizes the novel based on realist-naturalist inspiration, as in the literature of Eça de Queiroz, and introduces in Portugal the key ideas of futurism, one of the forms of the modernist movement. Pessoa deconstructs the idea of a reified nation with a Lusitanian past, rooted in literature and the romantic thought. In fact, the poet highlights the construct of nationhood itself, which is the idea of a nation showing that “Portuguese culture can thus realize that the nation is in fact a constructed image, and may take on the faces that their constructors want to give it” (Júdice 1996, p. 327).

The poet, inspired by and inspiring the modernist movement ideas, proposes artists’ freedom from social commitment. Taking the ideas of modernism to the highest degree, Pessoa “must assume the post-romantic separation between the artist and society” (Júdice 1996, p. 327). As Pessoa himself explains, “The indifference towards the country, towards religion, towards the so-called civic virtues and the mental paraphernalia of the gregarious instinct are not [simply] useful but an absolute obligation of the Artist” (Pessoa 1966 [1916], p. 158). Pessoa breaks away from romantic conventions and inaugurates an insight through literature. Just like the modernists, the poet shamelessly assumes the aristocratic conception of literature and art, disregarding a series of values portrayed by the bourgeoisie such as “stories of everyday life, the appreciation of common characters, the design of literature as a democratic pedagogical tool, etc.” (Gomes 2009, p. 11).

The modernists reject the use of literature as an instrument of propaganda and the imposition of bourgeois ideals. There is no rupture with society but rather “an instinctive struggle for the liberation of the inner life [of the artist], which is long-suppressed by rationalistic dogmas and Victorian conventions” (Bouças 1997, p. 219). It is in this direction that Pessoa advocates a nation based on important individual characters, announcing the next coming of the Super-Camões¹² in *A Nova Poesia Portuguesa (The New Portuguese Poetry)* which, according to Nuno Júdice, includes “nothing messianic, but rather is simply [produced by] the ‘greatest poet’ of the new Portuguese poetry” (Júdice 1996, p. 327). According to Pessoa, what distinguishes a nation from another is the great individuals who populate it and who mark the difference in relation to the ordinary mortals, in a perspective that reflects the aristocratic modernist position. As Pessoa asserts,

There is no need to scrutinize the nationality of poetry: If it is possible to prove its full and balanced originality, then, *ipso facto*, [poetry's] national character is absolutely proven. Because if a nation's poetry is, at a time, absolutely original, where might that originality come from, that power to be diverse and different from the other poetries, if not to be the genuine and supreme interpretation of what that country has as fundamentally diverse and different from other countries – and that is what it means to be one country and not another; it is the race. (Pessoa, 1912, p. 77)

Defining another characteristic of the modernist movement, the universalist poet finds in language the main difference between the Portuguese and other peoples; hence his claim that “the Portuguese language is my Motherland.” To Pessoa, the language of Portuguese itself was just as significant to the development of a Portuguese modernist identity as the emphasis on the present—and the implied lack of obligation to the past—and the pursuit of a permanent state of innovation (Best; Kellner, 1997, p. 126). According to Júdice (1996), this is what leads to Pessoa's rejection of doctrines that “draw their foundations from [past] values” (p. 328).

Conclusion

Among the numerous writings of Fernando Pessoa, it is difficult to enumerate the most or least important of his works. *Mensagem* (2011) [1934], for example, summarizes his modernist ideas and all of his conceptions. As stated by Nuno Júdice, based in this book, Pessoa still carries out the avant-garde program in two areas, which Dionísio Vila Maior describes as (1) “the intention to destroy tradition, the symbols and the images of the cultural memory...[and (2)] the desire to overcome the past, to jump over the present and update the future (which therefore makes the future the only valid dimension of time).” The verse from the poem “O Infante” in *Mensagem*, “Lord, we have yet to fulfil Portugal” is the transposition of the dysphoric image of the present which will only find its ideal realization in the Future (Júdice 1996, p. 333).

The poet's cosmopolitan path and the urban ideals defended by modernism lead to the defense of a concept of a cosmopolitan and pagan nation, which is less communitarian, more spiritually than physically imperial, and more individualistic. Apart from the rurality, religiosity, and predictability of life values, so characteristic of the times of romanticism, one of the great originalities of Pessoa was the attribution of a local character to an international movement like modernism, creating, in fact, a new form of modernism. Throughout his writing is visible a *modified modernism*, adapted to a specific sociocultural context, the Portuguese, under the denomination of *sensacionism*.

Our goal in this article was to convey the vision of what was a particular moment of Portuguese culture and the integration of the Portuguese into a globalized world at the beginning of the twentieth century. In the field of literature, Fernando Pessoa, one of the greatest Portuguese poets, is recognized over the world, constituting the pinnacle of the Portuguese claim for a place in the fields of art and culture across the globe.

Notes

¹ Important figures of Portuguese history, such as the kings and the navigators, inhabit *Mensagem*, a remarkable work of Fernando Pessoa. They are the individuals who, by personifying the Motherland, produced the particularities of the Portuguese nation in the language. In *Mensagem*, Pessoa, who is identified with the values of modernism, such as the cult of paganism, rejects a nationalism linked to Faith and the Empire.

² The Pink Map or “Rose Colored Map” was an 1885 document on which Portugal outlined a region it claimed as part of its sovereign territory (consisting of a stretch of land across Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Malawi,

connecting its colonial territories on the east and west coasts, in Mozambique and Angola). However, the country's regional rival, Great Britain, refused to accept any claims of sovereignty not based on effective occupation, which Portugal did not maintain. The 1890 British Ultimatum effectively ended Portuguese claims to the region and damaged the prestige of the Portuguese monarchy, paving the way for the birth of republicanism.

³ The University of Porto is a public university in Portugal, founded in 1911 following the birth of the republic. Firstly it was constituted by the Schools of Medicine and Sciences. Its School of Arts (*Faculdade de Artes*) was founded in 1919, and closed in 1928 as a result of alleged financial reasons. In fact, University of Porto School of Arts was closed by Decree No. 15.365, dated April 12, 1928, signed by Minister Alfredo de Magalhães. However, the enrolled students obtained authorization to finish their degrees and the classes worked until 31 July 1931, the date of the last exam

(https://sigarra.up.pt/up/pt/web_base.gera_pagina?p_pagina=evolu%C3%A7%C3%A3o%20da%20universidade%20do%20porto#letras). This school was re-inaugurated in 1961.

⁴ As Adriano Eysen (2017) points out, the “artistic and fraternal complicity of these two poets contributed, especially from 1913 to 1916, to the constellation of two geniuses, whose literary art had been shining for decades. Affection, admiration, and reciprocal respect brought together two souls who were empowered by the uneasiness of modern life. In the background, they are two beings in permanent unrest [who] go through the curvilinear paths of reality and fiction” (p. 419). An in-depth analysis of such dialogue between the Portuguese poets was made by Ricardo Vasconcelos and Jerónimo Martins, who compiled and studied much of the correspondence exchanged between Mário de Sá-Carneiro and Fernando Pessoa, as well as their mutual influences in the book *In Gold and Soul: Correspondence of Fernando Pessoa with Mário de Sá-Carneiro*, published in 2015.

⁵ Humorism was a predecessor movement of modernism in Portugal. It was constituted in 1912 by a group of intellectuals who first used illustration and caricature, then literature, as a way to cultivate a taste for the modern, and to insert a society in the modernist ideas.

⁶ Despite these intentions, they lacked national mentors, theoretical preparation, and critical and creative reflection on futurism (França, 1983). The exception was a text published by Pessoa under the pseudonym of Álvaro de Campos, called *Mandado de Despejo aos Mandarins da Europa (Eviction Mandate for the Mandarins of Europe)* which serves as Portuguese futurism's fundamental text in the various fields of sociology, politics, and aesthetics” (França, 1983, p. 23).

⁷ Mário de Sá-Carneiro met for the first time with Fernando Pessoa in October 1912, and from that time, developed a friendship and a fraternal dialogue with Pessoa, which was reflected in more than two hundred letters that they had exchanged. At a time when the great Portuguese intellectuals received government scholarships to study in Paris, Mário de Sá-Carneiro traveled from Lisbon to the city of lights on October 13, 1912, while Fernando Pessoa remained in Lisbon. The distance strengthened the relationship between the two and the exchange of ideas about their works, as well as the proliferation of letters, telegrams, and postcards, often with original poems attached, did not cease until Mário de Sá-Carneiro's suicide in his room at the Nice Hotel on April 26, 1916.

⁸ In a letter written on June 30, 1914 to Pessoa, Mário de Sá-Carneiro refers to *Ode Triunfal*, as having no doubt “in assuring you, my friend, you have just written the futurism masterpiece. Because, although, perhaps not pure, schooling futuristic, the whole ode is absolutely futuristic.... After writing your ode, my dear Fernando Pessoa, I believe that nothing new can be written to sing our time (Sá-Carneiro, 2015, p. 223).

⁹ *Paulismo* is a literary theme that is associated with gloomy environments and “dark waters.”

¹⁰ *Interseccionismo*, an artistic theme that was preceded by *Paulismo* and ultimately replaced by *sensacionismo*, was associated with the intersection of perceptions and sensations. Pessoa was influenced by this process of intersection and subsequently initiated a literary movement by the same name.

¹¹ In its original Portuguese, the quote reads “Basta pum basta! Uma geração, que consente deixar-se representar por um dantas é uma geração que nunca o foi! É um coio d'indigentes, d'indignos e de cegos! É uma rêsma de charlatães e de vendidos, e só pode parir abaixo de zero! Abaixo a geração! Morra o dantas, morra! Pim!”

¹² Luís Vaz de Camões is considered one of the greatest Portuguese poets. Camões was born in 1524 and died around 1580, lived the golden age of the Portuguese discoveries. Discoveries, the bravery and courage of the Lusitanian people, during his time, is the theme of the Luís Vaz de Camões poems. Pessoa considers the coming of a Super-Camões, who would be himself, fundamental to rebuild a nation in deep crisis as was Portugal in the beginning of the twenty-first century.

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