

Fernando Pessoa, Ultraism, and Painting

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So far as we know, Fernando Pessoa never wrote a single line on ultraism, the avant-garde movement that provided the context for the first Spanish translation of his work. On September 11, 1923, the poet Rogelio Buendía published Spanish versions in the Huelva daily *La Provincia* of five of the *Inscriptions* written by Pessoa in English.¹ Only a week later, on September 18, Adriano del Valle, the lynchpin and promoter of Pessoa's relations with the Spanish avant-garde, included an article entitled "Concerning *La rueda de color* [The Wheel of Color]: Opinion of a Portuguese Poet on a Book by Rogelio Buendía" in the pages of the Seville newspaper *La Unión*. The piece traced the coordinates for the overtures made to Pessoa by the young ultraist poets of Andalusia, whose select group was joined shortly afterward by Isaac del Vando-Villar, the director of the journal *Grecia*. However, the ultraists at that time considered Pessoa not as a poet but as a literary critic who had been forged in the pages of the *Saudosista* magazine *A Águia* (to which Rafael Cansinos Assens was a subscriber), and in 1923 and 1924, when their attention to him was at its height, they tried to win his favor in the hope of securing publication of reviews of their books in Portugal. Two failed attempts in this respect were Buendía's *La rueda de color* and Vando-Villar's *La sombrilla japonesa* (The Japanese Sunshade).

Fernando Pessoa may never have written the word *ultraism*, but he did have the opportunity to read it on at least three occasions, all in 1924, when the movement was entering its final phase. The first, between January and June of that year, was in the Lisbon magazine *Contemporânea* (1922–1926), edited by the architect José Pacheco (or Pacheko), which had become a key mouthpiece for Hispano-Portuguese modernist dialogue. Among those who appeared in its pages were Ramón Gómez de la Serna, del Valle, and Buendía, as well as paintings by Daniel Vázquez Díaz and sculptures by his wife, Eva Aggerholm, alongside the brightest stars of the first wave of modernism in Portugal—Pessoa, Mário de Sá-Carneiro, José de Almada Negreiros, and the painters Amadeo de Souza-Cardoso, Eduardo Viana,

1. Fernando Pessoa, "Inscripciones," trans. by Rogelio Buendía, *La Provincia*, September 11, 1923, 1.

and Jorge Barradas. In the tenth issue of *Contemporânea*, del Valle published a text entitled "Isaac del Vando-Villar in Seven Colors" (1924), in which he affirmed in the tone of one of Serna's aphoristic *Greguerías* that, "for Isaac, Ultraism has been what nickel rings are to performing parrots."²

The second reference came on May 29, when Guillermo de Torre was interviewed by the *Diário de Lisboa* on the occasion of a brief visit he made to the Portuguese capital.³ In that column, illustrated with a portrait by the "admirable Spanish painter" Vázquez Díaz (one of the capital figures in the dialogue between the modernists of Spain and Portugal, who dedicated such key works to that country as *La rua de Portugal* [The Street in Portugal, 1922–1923, p. 272], *Ventana sobre Portugal (pecera)* [Window onto Portugal (Fishbowl), n.d.], and the drawings *Vista de Portugal* [View of Portugal, ca. 1923] and *Nazaré* [n.d.]), the poet was described as "one of the orienters of the highly modern literary trend called *Ultraism*." In this brief interview, it is striking how de Torre, when questioned about what he knows and finds of interest in Portugal, mentions only the symbolist Eugénio de Castro (the best-known and most widely read Portuguese poet in the Spanish-speaking world during the first half of the twentieth century), Teixeira de Pascoaes (the apostle of *Saudosismo*, also well-known and translated in Spain), and Leonardo Coimbra (the philosopher and ideologue of the same movement). This detail shows on the one hand that the ultraist had no points of reference among the Portuguese avant-garde (as is also sadly evident from his monumental *Literaturas europeas de vanguardia* [European Avant-garde Literatures, 1925]) and, on the other hand, that his knowledge of Portuguese writers was limited to those three names, all of whom had visited the Residencia de Estudiantes in Madrid in 1922 to give talks or readings.⁴

While these two opportunities for Pessoa to develop an interest in ultraism were indirect, the third and last was explicit and forthright. Its protagonist was del Valle, who wrote a fascinating letter to Pessoa

on November 10 in which, while commenting on the reception of his magazine *Athena*, he makes the following remarks: "we youngsters did a magazine in Seville that was called *Grecia*, in which we created the bold modern literary school that has encompassed the globe with the name—I don't know if it will have reached your ears—of *Ultraism*."⁵ Whether or not it had reached Pessoa's ears, he never showed any interest in its style or its philosophy, and this is apparently confirmed by the fact that this letter sent by del Valle was the last in their preserved correspondence, having been written more than a year after their first and only personal meeting in Lisbon in June 1923.

Despite the impassioned but humble attempts of the ultraists, the relationship between Pessoa and early Portuguese poetic modernism with the earliest Spanish literary avant-garde is rather like a landscape in chiaroscuro, with some direct links and a handful of common factors and characteristics. Spanish ultraism and Portuguese modernism were born as responses to neoromantic excess, realism, and, most directly, Spanish art nouveau (*modernismo*) and Portuguese symbolism, and were intended to mark a break from them and be a step ahead of them. Their emergence, however, is intimately tied to coexistence with the different symbolist and *modernista* formulae, clearly appreciable in the first issue of *Orpheu* (1915) and the magazine *Grecia* (1918–1920). In the meantime, both movements established a much needed and lively dialogue with the plastic arts, as manifested in the illustrations of their magazines and the work of the painters who belonged to their circles, such as Almada Negreiros, Souza-Cardoso, and the futurist Guilherme de Santa Rita (also known as Santa Rita Pintor) on the Portuguese side, and Vázquez Díaz, Barradas, and Władysław Jahl on the Spanish, to cite only some early examples. Finally, both the ultraists and the Portuguese modernists shared the historic role of representing an incipient avant-garde whose beginnings can be precisely dated to 1915 in the case of Portugal, with the appearance of the magazine *Orpheu*, and to 1918 in Spain, with the emergence of ultraism after Xavier Bóveda's interview with Cansinos Assens in *El Parlamentario*. At the same time, they were the immediate precedents, though held

■ 2. Adriano del Valle, "Isaac del Vando-Villar en siete colores: Prólogo para el libro *La sombrilla japonesa*," *Contemporânea*, no. 10 (March 1924): 14. ■ 3. "Fala ao *Diário de Lisboa* um ultraista hespanhol," *Diário de Lisboa*, May 29, 1924, 5. ■ 4. See the monographic issue dedicated to the Residencia de Estudiantes by the journal *Poesía*, no. 18–19 (1984): 67.

■ 5. See Antonio Sáez Delgado, *Pessoa y España* (Valencia: Pre-Textos, 2015), 146.

in varying degrees of esteem, of a second avant-garde in the Iberian Peninsula, now filtered through a reinterpretation of the relationship between tradition and modernity, whose leading figures belonged to the second wave of Portuguese modernism, linked with the Coimbra magazine *presença*, and to the Generation of '27 in Spain.

Nevertheless, these parallels need to be combined with a fundamental notion that has left a profound and sometimes indelible mark on studies of the presence of the avant-garde in both countries. I am referring to the intrinsic value of the work of its principal artists, with the inevitable consequences of this for the construction of the two national literary canons. The constellation created around Pessoa, with satellites such as Sá-Carneiro and Almada Negreiros (who made both literary and plastic contributions), occupies a place of honor in the history of twentieth-century Portuguese culture, while the chief standard-bearers of Spanish ultraism, with an oeuvre frankly overshadowed by that of Spain's neighbors, have never achieved a status comparable with their opposite numbers in Portugal, ceding their preeminence in the development of lyrical modernism to the voices of the Generation of '27.

If we broaden this overview of Iberian bonds and relationships to include the plastic arts (as was proposed in avant-garde tracts and public meetings in both countries), we encounter surprises and new material for analysis. Tracing out some basic lines will allow us to delimit the terrain, and these must begin in 1915. Not only was this the year when *Orpheu* was published in Lisbon, but the *I Exposição de Humoristas e Modernistas* (First Exhibition of Humorists and Modernists) was held in Porto with the participation of Almada, António Soares, Pacheco, Stuart Carvalhais, and others, while the *Exposición de Pintores Íntegros* (Exhibition of Integral Painters) was held in Madrid, with a catalogue whose prologue was written by Serna, included works by Diego Rivera (the closest to the avant-garde cause), María Blanchard, Luis Bagaría, and Agustín Choco. That year, then, can be taken as a starting point for a process that visibly leads to 1925, the final year of ultraism, when the last issues of the magazine *Athena* (in which Pessoa fully developed his sensationist theories through the voices of his heteronyms) appeared in Lisbon and when the *Exposición de la Sociedad de Artistas Ibéricos* (Exhibition of the Society of Iberian Artists), to which the magazine *Alfar*, close to ultraism,



Rafael Barradas
Calle de Barcelona
[Street in Barcelona], 1918

dedicated its fifty-first issue, opened in Madrid. This was also the moment when three fundamental books were published in Spain and helped to mark a watershed in the complex history of Iberian modernism: *La deshumanización del arte* (The Dehumanization of Art) by José Ortega y Gasset, *Literaturas europeas de vanguardia* (Avant-garde European Literatures) by de Torre, and *El ultraísmo en España* (Ultraism in Spain) by Manuel de la Peña.

From 1915 to 1925 there occurred many of the most important events of the historic avant-garde in Portugal and Spain, with elements relating the worlds of literature and painting in both countries. One of the circumstances that without doubt did most to favor

the appearance of a new art in the Iberian Peninsula was the presence there of Sonia Delaunay and Robert Delaunay, who brought simultaneism to Spain in two phases, from 1914 to 1915 and from 1917 to 1921, with an intermediate period in which they took it to Portugal. Their presence was fundamental for the course taken by the ultraist avant-garde, and those close to them included not only de Torre (who dedicated his poems "Torre Eiffel" [Eiffel Tower] and "Arco iris" [Rainbow] to them in *Hélices* and who wrote a study in 1922 on Robert's work entitled, "Destruction et construction, la peinture de Delaunay") and Serna (recall his "Abanico de palabras para Sonia Delaunay" [Fan of Words for Sonia Delaunay]), but also some who were in correspondence with Pessoa, such as Vando-Villar (who included a "simultaneous poem" in *La sombrilla japonesa*) and Buendía (the simultaneist echoes of the title of his book *La rueda de color* seem evident), together with a large number of painters who were in the capital during the ultraist years, such as Vázquez Díaz, Jahl, and Carlos Sáenz de Tejada.

Although the Delaunays failed to establish stable and direct links between the painters of the two countries, the "simultaneous" was to be one of the keys to an understanding of the new times. As a sensory experience, orphist in filiation,⁶ it was also a factor close to sensationism and the latter's preoccupation with "feeling everything in every way." The simultaneous might even be said to be already patent in the intersectionism that Pessoa had launched in *Orpheu* through his poem "Chuva oblíqua" (Slanting Rain), where echoes of Arthur Rimbaud (*Marine*) are found paralleling those of cubism. From this viewpoint the Delaunays left an even deeper impression on Portugal than on Spain, visible in the work of great painters like Souza-Cardoso (he dedicated *Canção popular—A Russa e o Figaro* [Popular Song—The Russian, 1916, p. 179] to them), Viana (clearly engrossed in the movement in *A revolta das bonecas* [The Revolt of the Dolls, 1916, pp. 186–187]), Pacheco (who invited the couple in the first half of 1916 to take part in an exhibition at the Galeria das Artes in Lisbon), and Almada Negreiros (who, like the others named here, belonged to the Corporation Nouvelle organized by the Delaunays).

■ 6. See Jordi Cerdà, "Mouvement de Nouveauté," in *Suroeste: Relaciones literarias y artísticas entre Portugal y España (1890–1936)*, ed. Antonio Sáez Delgado and Luís Manuel Gaspar (Badajoz: SECC—Ministerio de Cultura, 2010), 1:213–30.

The magazine *Portugal futurista* appeared in 1917, when the Delaunays were already back in Madrid. Its pages contained poems by Guillaume Apollinaire and Blaise Cendrars "published by Mme Sonia Delaunay-Terk," Álvaro de Campos's *Ultimatum*, the "Saltimbancos (contrastes simultâneos)" (Mountebanks (Simultaneous Contrasts)) dedicated by Almada to Santa Rita Pintor, and some poems from Pessoa's *Ficções do interlúdio* (Fictions of the Interlude). A year later, in 1918—the year Guilherme Filipe exhibited in Madrid, coinciding with the birth of ultraism—Vázquez Díaz returned to the Spanish capital from Paris, as did Barradas (in his case from Barcelona), who had founded vibrationism with Joaquín Torres-García and Joan Salvat-Papasseit and was to draw india ink portraits of many of the ultraists and frequent the literary gatherings at Pombo. With these names, together with the contributions of the Argentine Norah Borges and the Poles Jahl and Marjan Paszkiewicz, the pictorial adventure of Spanish ultraism took shape. In a way, behind its own formula of aesthetic ambiguity, it, too, was bent on "feeling everything in every modern way." In several seminal essays in which he analyses the role played by the plastic arts in ultraism, Juan Manuel Bonet⁷ follows in the wake of the contributions of Jaime Brihuega⁸ and Eugenio Carmona⁹ to bequeath us a long list of painters linked to the spirit of the movement. Besides those already mentioned, these include Alberto, Francisco Mateos, Salvador Dalí, Gabriel García Maroto, Józef Pankiewicz, Francisco Bores, Francisco de Santa Cruz, Pancho Cossío, Rafael Alberti, Cándido Fernández Mazas, José María Ucelay, and Antonio de Gueza.

Vázquez Díaz merits special attention both because of his close ties with ultraism and his frequent presence in Portugal. While the Andalusian artist was one of the protagonists of the ultraist soirée in January 1921 at the Sala Parisiana in Madrid, decorated for the

■ 7. Juan Manuel Bonet, "Baedeker del ultraismo," in *El ultraismo y las artes plásticas* (Valencia: IVAM, 1996), 9–60; and Juan Manuel Bonet, "Portugal-España 1900–1936: Artes plásticas," in *Suroeste*, 1:45–58. Bonet is also responsible for the fullest, most recent, and best-documented anthology of ultraist poetry: *Las cosas se han roto: Antología de la poesía ultraísta* (Seville: Fundación José Manuel Lara, 2012). ■ 8. Jaime Brihuega, "La ESAI y el arte español en la bisagra de 1925," in *La sociedad de artistas ibéricos y el arte español de 1925* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 1995), 15–32. ■ 9. Eugenio Carmona, "El 'arte nuevo' y el 'retorno al orden' 1918–1926," in *La sociedad de artistas ibéricos y el arte español de 1925*, 47–58.



Daniel Vázquez Díaz
La rua de Portugal [Street
 in Portugal], ca. 1922–1923

occasion by the Delaunays and exhibiting some of his works alongside those of Jahl and Paszkiewicz,¹⁰ he was then in Portugal from September 1922 to March 1923, exhibiting his works at the salon of the Lisbon journal *Ilustração Portuguesa* (where he had previously presented his etching *Danza* [Dance] in the 1920 Humorists' Salon),

■ 10. See José Antonio Sarmiento, *Las veladas ultraístas* (Cuenca: Centro de Creación Experimental, 2013).

at the Hotel Avenida in Coimbra, and at the Society of Fine Arts of Porto. In the Portuguese capital, he had the opportunity to meet Almada Negreiros. (He had previously met Souza-Cardoso at the Académie Vitti in Paris, where both were assiduous pupils of Hermenegildo Anglada Camarasa.)¹¹ Vázquez Díaz, a signatory of the manifesto of the Society of Iberian Artists, even did a portrait of Almada Negreiros for the cover of his “A cena do ódio” (The Scene of Hatred), separate from *Contemporânea* (no. 7, January 1923), and for the pages of *La gaceta literaria* (no. 3, February 1, 1927), where it illustrated the legendary article “El alma de Almada” (The Soul of Almada), written by Serna to mark the Portuguese artist’s arrival in Madrid. This text prepared the way for the exhibition held by Almada later in 1927 at the Unión Iberoamericana, organized by Ernesto Giménez Caballero and significantly dedicated “to the memory of Juan Gris and Picasso, Sunyer, Vázquez Díaz and Solana.” The exhibition was a great success and encouraged Almada to remain until 1932 in the Spanish capital. There he wove an extraordinary web of contacts with Spanish artists, writers, and architects from the literary gatherings at the Café Zahara, including Federico García Lorca, Manuel Abril, Antonio Espina, Giménez Caballero, Juan Manuel Díaz-Caneja, Benjamín Palencia, García Maroto, Luis Lacasa, and García Mercadal.¹² In the *Almanaque de las artes y las letras para 1928* (Almanac of the Arts and Letters for 1928), coordinated by García Maroto (who painted a study in foreshortening of the Viaduct in Madrid, an ultraist symbol, for the *Exhibition of the Society of Iberian Artists* in 1925, the year César González-Ruano published his book *Viaducto* [Viaduct]), poems by Pessoa and Lorca appeared together in the same publication for the first and only time during the lives of both authors. It was a nebulous presaging of a possible rapprochement between the Generation of ’27 and the Portuguese avant-garde that never came about.

What did occur from 1925 onward was the creation of a full-fledged diaspora comprising many of the names gathered around avant-garde painting in Madrid. In that year, which marks the end of ultraism, Barradas left Madrid and returned to Catalonia, which was also to be Dalí’s destination. Sáenz de Tejada and Boreas went to Paris,

■ 11. See Ana Berruguete, “Vázquez Díaz y Portugal,” in *Suroeste*, 325–40. ■ 12. See Antonio Sáez Delgado and Filipa Maria Valido-Viegas de Paula-Soures, *Almada Negreiros en Madrid* (Madrid: Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, 2017).

where Palencia later appeared too. In 1928 García Maroto sailed for Mexico and shortly afterward published his seminal *La nueva España* (The New Spain, 1930). These were the years immediately preceding the writing of many of the definitive fragments of Pessoa's *Livro do desassossego* (Book of Disquiet)—precisely those identified most clearly with the semiheteronym Bernardo Soares¹³—and when the author had already concluded most of his texts devoted to the subject of Iberia.¹⁴ They were also the years when, in astounding parallel synchrony, the *presença* and '27 generations gave a further twist to a new avant-garde that was now filtered through a certain aesthetic "return to order," though it failed to establish the necessary coordinates for a stable and lasting entente across the Iberian Peninsula. The phantom of the encounters and misencounters of the two countries suddenly loomed over the peninsula once more, and from the appearance of the 1928 *Almanaque* until his death in 1935, Pessoa saw no more of his work published in Spain. The Portuguese writer's next landmark would have to wait until 1944, when the poet Rafael Morales took a new interest in Pessoa's work in the pages of the magazine *Garcilaso*. That landmark was situated in a social context branded by the experiences of the postwar years, when dialogue with the survivors of the Portuguese avant-garde with links to the Salazar régime—a leading role was played in this case by António Ferro—resulted in the writing of a new chapter in the complex cultural relations between the two countries.

■ 13. See Fernando Pessoa, *Livro do desassossego*, ed. Jerónimo Pizarro, 2 vols. (Lisbon: INCM, 2010). ■ 14. See Fernando Pessoa, *Iberia: Introdução a um imperialismo futuro*, trans. by Antonio Sáez Delgado (Valencia: Pre-Textos, 2013). Includes an introduction and notes by Sáez Delgado, a philological note by Jerónimo Pizarro, and epilogues by Humberto Brito and Pablo Javier Pérez López.

Absence in *presença*: The Second Modernity

In the wake of the *Orpheu* generation, the forty issues of the magazine *presença* (edited by Branquinho da Fonseca, João Gaspar Simões, and José Régio) published from 1927 to 1940 represent a second modernity in Portuguese art and culture. The majority of Pessoa's texts published during his lifetime were published there, and his unpublished works began to appear thanks to some of the magazine's editors after Pessoa's death. Far less bold than other Portuguese avant-garde magazines in terms of rupture and avant-garde attitude, *presença* (considered by some to be counterrevolutionary in the context of Portuguese modernity) did, however, influence Lusitanian artistic

and cultural thought for several decades of the twentieth century. A new generation of writers and artists published in its pages, were also open to cinema through the publishing of scripts and by Manoel de Oliveira, the first representative of art cinema in Portugal and the longest-living director in the history of film, of whose first film, *Douro, Fúria Fluvial* (Labor on the Douro), Pessoa had kept a newspaper clipping in his collection. The plural language of *presença* opened an explicit expressionist and prospective lyricism manifested in the magazine's illustrations by a generation of artists such as Affonso, Mário Eloy, and Júlio



Júlio dos Reis Pereira
Tarde de festa [Evening Party], 1925