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## Almada Negreiros, a Portuguese Futurist

**Abstract:** In the beginning of the 1910's, José de Almada Negreiros, together with the writers Fernando Pessoa and Mário de Sá-Carneiro and the young artists Amadeo de Souza-Cardoso, Santa Rita Pintor, Eduardo Viana and José Pacheco, tried out daring and unusual formats of writing, drawing and public gestures that reflected Futurist predecessors and acted as a force of change in Portugal. Together, they set up the magazine *Orpheu*, which became the emblematic periodical of Portuguese Modernism. Almada distinguished himself with his *Manifesto Anti-Dantas e por extenso*, a polemical pamphlet directed against Júlio Dantas and everyone who contributed to the cultural and artistic backwardness of the country, and with the poem-manifesto, *A cena do ódio*, written for the third issue of *Orpheu*, which was not published at the time. In the years 1915–17, Almada Negreiros became a propagandist-performer who adapted Marinetti's technique of Words-in-Freedom (*parole in libertà*) and almost completely set aside his production as a fine artist. After the creation of a Lisbon Futurist Committee in 1917, Almada presented himself to the public in a first Futurist soirée. Shortly afterwards, the only issue of *Portugal futurista* appeared and was immediately seized by the police. In 1918, after the death of Santa Rita Pintor and Amadeo de Souza-Cardoso, Almada's enthusiasm for the avant-garde began to fade and Portuguese Futurism found an early end. In 1919, before leaving for Paris, Almada became involved in an aristocratic intellectual circle in Lisbon and devoted himself to the creation of ballets inspired by Diaghilev's Ballets Russes.

**Keywords:** Portuguese Modernism, Orpheu, Portugal futurista, manifestos, art of recitation, Ballets Russes

### The Period of *Orpheu*

José Sobral de Almada Negreiros (1893–1970) was a Portuguese artist, writer, caricaturist, literary critic and translator, a key figure in the first generation of Portuguese modernists and in twentieth-century Portuguese culture. He was born in the colony of São Tomé and Príncipe and in 1900 entered a Jesuit boarding school in Lisbon. After the Republican Revolution of October 1910, he changed to the Escola Internacional, also in Lisbon. In this upper-class lyceum he pursued his great passion for drawing, particularly of caricatures, which he began to publish in 1911 in the periodical *A sátira: Revista humorística de caricaturas* and to exhibit in the 1912 Salão dos Humoristas Portugueses. In the same year, he

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edited and illustrated a manuscript journal, *A paródia*, and in 1913 was granted a first one-man show with 90 designs in the Escola Internacional.

As a young man in his mid-20s, Almada Negreiros sought the companionship of writers and artists who shared his interests. He became friends with the writers Fernando Pessoa and Mário de Sá-Carneiro – the latter spending in that time long periods in Paris – and the young artists Amadeo de Souza-Cardoso, Santa Rita Pintor, Eduardo Viana and José Pacheco, who had also spent some time in the French capital absorbing the new artistic tendencies that had arisen there. Together with these friends, and others who would join them later, Almada tried out new ways of expression, unusual writing formats and daring forms of composition, which in 1915 contributed to *Orpheu*, a periodical that rang in a modernist phase in Portuguese culture. This “Quarterly Magazine of Literature” broke away from traditionalist models and proclaimed the aesthetic values of a new generation of artists inspired by the avant-garde trends arriving from Paris. Only two numbers of the magazine were issued: January-March and April-June 1915. The third did not advance beyond the proof sheet stage and came to be published only in the 1980s.<sup>1</sup>

Almada Negreiros contributed to the first issue of the magazine twelve poems entitled *Frisos* (Friezes), written in prose style but directly inspired by visual impressions. His name did not appear in the second issue, but was included in the list of contributors to *Orpheu* no. 3, the issue which never came out, with an extended poem, *A cena do ódio* (The Scene of Hate). This work was only partially published in 1923 by the journal *Contemporânea*, and received great acclaim from Mário de Sá-Carneiro and Pessoa, among others. Almada Negreiros dedicated his poem to Fernando Pessoa’s heteronym that represented the fury of the Portuguese avant-garde: “A Álvaro de Campos / a / dedicação intensa / de todos os meus avatares” (To Álvaro de Campos / a / heart-felt dedication / from all my avatars). Shortly afterwards, Pessoa reciprocated by dedicating his *Passagem das horas: Ode sensacionista* (The Passage of Time: Sensationist Ode, 1916) to “Almada Negreiros: You can’t imagine how thankful I am for the fact that you exist.”<sup>2</sup> The signatory was the same Álvaro de Campos who in the preface to an anthology of Sensationist poets<sup>3</sup> characterized Almada as being “more spontaneous and rapid

1 The correspondence between Sá-Carneiro and Pessoa suggests that the third issue of *Orpheu* was not printed due to the fact that Sá-Carneiro’s father withdrew his funds when he heard that the magazine caused such a furore in Lisbon and that Santa Rita was on the brink of taking over its editorship.

2 “Almada Negreiros: você não imagina como eu lhe agradeço o facto de você existir.” Lisboa, Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, Espólio de Fernando Pessoa, E3, envelope 71A–53.

3 “Prefácio para uma Antologia de poetas sensacionistas”, *Obras em prosa*, p. 450.

[...], younger than the others, not only in age, but in spontaneity and effervescence [...], a man of genius [...], a very distinct personality.”<sup>4</sup>

The first issue of *Orpheu* provoked controversial debates amongst intellectuals who were opposed to any form of art and literature that deviated from the established paradigms and models. Almada Negreiros and his friends were intent on putting an end to the artistic manifestations of a bygone era, and in particular the *saudosismo* of *A águia*.<sup>5</sup> The result was a magazine that was a degree too audacious for the Lisbon public, but still sold out and was soon followed by a second issue. This time, it caused a public outcry. *Orpheu*’s overturning of all social conventions and cultural traditions scandalized the Portuguese conservative bourgeoisie, who considered the group to be nothing but “smart alecks” producing “asylum literature”.

One of these detractors was Júlio Dantas (1876–1962), a renowned writer-doctor-politician who, among other insinuations, called everyone from *Orpheu* “paranoid poets”.<sup>6</sup> As we shall see below, Almada responded to this critique with a manifesto, *Manifesto Anti-Dantas e por extenso* (Manifesto Against Dantas, Without Abbreviations, 1915) and thus became the centre of a dispute that filled the newspaper pages for weeks.

### Almada Negreiros’ *A cena do ódio* and *Manifesto Anti-Dantas*

As Almada Negreiros stated, *A cena do ódio* was written in a period of great political instability, “during the three days and three nights that the revolution of 14 May 1915 lasted”.<sup>7</sup> No doubt, the rebellious environment of the Portuguese capital that set an end to the government of Pimenta de Castro, and the belligerent echoes of the Great War contributed to and enhanced the insubordinate tone employed by Almada in his poem-manifesto. It was a voice of protest fed by a visceral hatred, written by a person who introduced himself as “José de Almada-Negreiros, Sensationist Poet and Narcissus of Egypt” and further on as “Narcissus of My Hatred”,<sup>8</sup> and directed against all those who had caused the political stagnation and intellectual mediocrity of the Nation:

<sup>4</sup> Pessoa: *Páginas íntimas e de auto-interpretação*, p. 141. The poet wrote these words in English.

<sup>5</sup> See Nuno Júdice’s essay “Futurism in Portugal” in this volume.

<sup>6</sup> Dantas: “Poetas paranóicos.”

<sup>7</sup> “Foi escrito durante os três dias e as três noites que durou a revolução de 14 de Maio de 1915.” All quotations from the poem are taken from Almada Negreiros: *Poemas*, pp. 23–43.

<sup>8</sup> “De José de Almada-Negreiros Poeta Sensacionista e Narciso do Egipto” – “Sou Narciso do Meu Ódio!”

You folks that have bosses, you robots functioning cheaply for those who are in charge [...], worthless cashiers, pederasts of the counter [...], and you, disgusting politicians [...], rotund and paunchy bloodsuckers, discredited bourgeois dandies [...], you old bluebloods born with a life already mapped out for you!<sup>9</sup>

The poem starts impetuously:

I stand here, a gay man hooted by imbeciles,  
I deify Myself Harlot, ex-libris of Sin,  
And I hate whoever is not-Me,  
Because I am being laughed at!<sup>10</sup>

The egocentric speech uses the first person singular, frequently typed in capital letters, and predicts the future laid out for this “me”. These prophecies echo historical, mythical, mythological and popular figures, contain references from the classical tradition, and make use of associations of Christian and Judaic origin, for instance: “I will be Fuas without the statue of the miraculous Virgin, / I will be galloping drugged and crazy, drugged and crazy..., / I will be Attila, I will be Nero, I will be Me.”<sup>11</sup> The text is a torrent of insults and provocative accusations against “You, who call yourself a Man!” “You beast!” “You bourgeois!” “You mediocrity!” “You plebs, you simpleton! / enslaved by your ignorance!” “You miserable journalists / who whip up public opinion with titillation and other things”.<sup>12</sup> But there is also clever word play, such as “A pátria onde Camões morreu de fome / e onde todos enchem a barriga de Camões!” (The homeland where Camões died of starvation / and where everyone feasts to the full on Camões!); rhetoric questions that stress the futility of art and literature, such as “Why did you punish your children by sending them to the Arts Academy / when they didn’t do well in

<sup>9</sup> “E vós ó gentes que tendes patrões, autómatos do dono a funcionar barato [...], reles caixeiros, pederastas do balcão [...], nojentos da Política [...], meu rotundo e paçudo-sanguessugo / meu desacreditado burguês apinocado [...], sangue azul antigo / que já nasceste co’a biografia feita!”

<sup>10</sup> “Ergo-Me Pederasta apupado de imbecis, / divinizo-Me Meretriz, ex-líbris do Pecado, e odeio tudo o que não Me é por Me rirem o Eu!”

<sup>11</sup> “Hei-de ser Fuas sem Virgem do Milagre, / hei-de ser galope opiado e doido, opiado e doido..., / hei-de Átila, hei-de Nero, hei-de Eu.” The first line refers to Legend of Nazaré, the town that derives its name from a small statue of a Black Madonna, brought here from Nazareth in the fourth century. In the twelfth century, a Portuguese knight called Dom Fuas Roupinho, while hunting deer on a foggy morning, had his life saved when his horse miraculously stopped at the end of a protuberant rock some 100 meters above the Atlantic, now called “Bico do Milagre” (Point of the Miracle).

<sup>12</sup> “Tu, que te dizes Homem!”, “ó besta!”, “Ó burguesia!”, “Ó geral da mediocridade!”, “ó Humilde, ó Simples! / enjaulados na vossa ignorância!”, “pindéricos jornalistas / que fazeis cócegas e outras coisas / à opinião pública”.

elementary school? / Why do you tell everybody that your nitwit son / is studying to become a poet?”;<sup>13</sup> or questions that highlight the hypocrisy of the narrow-minded bourgeoisie, such as “Why did you get married to your wife / when you sleep more often with your maid?”<sup>14</sup> But there are also anaphorisms such as “Damned be the wise man and the thinker / Damned be him for all times and ages!”,<sup>15</sup> intransigent imperatives, such as “Look at yourself! Feel nauseated by your own loathing, you mastodon!”<sup>16</sup> and authoritative commands spoken against the city of perversion and corruption: “Larga a cidade!” (Leave the city!)

The text also reflects on the polemics between the *Orpheu* group and the good burghers of Lisbon: “You bare your teeth when people talk to you about Orpheu [...] And you call me a dupe / Me who knows and feels what I wrote!”<sup>17</sup> Without skimping on the violence of words, or the subversion of their meaning, Almada finishes off his poem with a dazzling show of eloquence, with allusion to successive metamorphoses of the “I”, a prophecy of an end to all misuse of intelligence and a prediction of the downfall of all those responsible for the national lethargy.

If the third issue of *Orpheu* had come out, *A cena do ódio* would have had the effect of a *tsunami* in the habitually still waters of Lisbon’s cultural life. Almada Negreiros was an ‘angry young man’ who was heading towards becoming an efficient political and cultural incendiary. Although *A cena do ódio* only reached its public in 1923, already in 1915 Almada’s name became associated with literary impetuosity, with a rebellion through words and provocative statements that oscillated between poetic form and inflammatory manifesto, thus anticipating the advent of Portuguese Futurism.

The *Manifesto Anti-Dantas e por extenso*, published in an edition printed at the author’s expense between June and July 1916, marked the aesthetic and political confrontation between the *Orpheu* group and their traditionalist contemporaries, represented by the emblematic figure of Júlio Dantas. This son of a military officer was a medic who had served in the Portuguese army, had become president of the Portuguese Academy of Science (1913) and had gained popularity as a polygraph writer of novels, plays and poetry. At the time of *Orpheu*, he was famous for his play, *A ceia dos cardeais* (The Cardinals’ Supper, 1902), which caused Almada

13 “Porque mandaste de castigo os teus filhos prás Belas-Artes / quando ficaram mal na instrução primária? / Porque é que dizes a toda a gente que o teu filho idiota / estuda para poeta?”

14 “Porque te casaste com a tua mulher / se dormes mais vezes co’a tua criada?”

15 “Ora bolas para os sábios e pensadores! / Ora bolas para todas as épocas e todas as idades!”

16 “Olha para ti!”, “Enjoa-te no teu nojo, mastodonte!”

17 “Tu arreganhas os dentes quando te falam d’*Orpheu*”, “E chamas-me doido a Mim / que sei e sinto o que Eu escrevi!”

to comment scathingly: “Dantas might know grammar, he might know syntax, he might know medicine, he might know how to cook suppers for cardinals, he might know everything, except how to write, – unfortunately this is the only thing he does.”<sup>18</sup> Almada used the première of Dantas’ play *Sóror Mariana* (Marianna Alcoforado, the Portuguese Nun, 1915) in the Teatro Ginásio in Lisbon, on 21 October 1915, to publish with some friends two letters in the local press.<sup>19</sup> Here, he reiterated the great mocking he had given to the aforementioned play and criticized not only Dantas, the playwright, but also all those who condemned the *Orpheu* group. A day after the première, on 22 October 1915 at the Café Martinho in the Rossio district, Almada Negreiros declaimed a first draft of his Anti-Dantas manifesto to a group of friends. The publication of the text a year later vexed Júlio Dantas so much that he bought – and thus withdrew from circulation – as many copies of the pamphlet as he could. Nonetheless, the rest of the edition lit a fuse that Dantas was unable to extinguish.

The *Manifesto Anti-Dantas e por extenso* has a rebelliousness and a style of writing that were typical of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti’s manifestos without, however, following an orthodox line of Futurism. The visual aspect of the manifesto contributes greatly to the provocative purpose of the speech and enhances its propagandistic, boisterous and eccentric tone: from the lettering – the text is typeset entirely in capital letters – to the expressive use of pictograms – e.g. the manicule → pointing to the onomatopoeic “PIM!” – to the use of expressive punctuation – for example, the exclamation marks in “TODOS OS DANTAS QUE HOVER POR AÍ!!!!!!!!!!!!!!” (ALL THE DANTAS OUT OF HERE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!).

Almada Negreiros distinguished himself as a soldier marching in the avant-garde’s frontline by using characteristic devices of a Futurist aesthetics and by declaring himself, right on the title page of the manifesto, as “POETA D’ORPHEU FUTURISTA e TUDO” (Poet of Orpheu, Futurist and Everything). Thus he isolated himself and his collaborators on *Orpheu* from all of those who slandered and rejected it, namely, the “GERAÇÃO, QUE CONSENTE DEIXAR-SE REPRESENTAR POR UM DANTAS” (the generation who agrees to be represented by a Dantas). The manifesto begins with a determined outcry against everything and everybody, “BASTA PUM BASTA” (Enough Wallop Enough), followed by a more specific outrage against the generation represented by Júlio Dantas (“UMA RESMA DE CHARLATÃES E DE VENDIDOS” – a bunch of charlatans and receiver of bribes),

<sup>18</sup> “O Dantas saberá gramática, saberá sintaxe, saberá medicina, saberá fazer ceias pra cardeais, saberá tudo menos escrever que é a única coisa que ele faz!” *Manifesto Anti-Dantas e por extenso*. All quotation from the manifesto can be found in Almada Negreiros: *Manifestos e conferências*, pp. 7–16.

<sup>19</sup> Almada Negreiros, et al.: “Incidente teatral.”

and also Dantas himself both on a personal and a professional level, often interpolated with an onslaught carried out in the manner of a chorus, “MORRA O DANTAS! MORRA! PIM! (Die, Dantas, die! Whizz!), where “PIM” is preceded by the aforementioned icon of a pointing index →. These attacks are extended to all those who admire Dantas and all those who, in any way, are connected to him.

At the centre of the manifesto, Almada offered a detailed description of the theatrical presentation of *Sóror Mariana* that had motivated the text. Almada’s contempt was not only directed against the play; on the contrary, he used it to identify a certain group of people in the Portuguese cultural and political establishment, who sided with the intellectuals longing for the glories of past and who failed to contribute to the artistic and social renewal of the country. Almada’s manifesto not only presented a long list of names belonging to that milieu, but also raised a battle cry against “ALL THE NEWSPAPERS OF LISBON”, “ACTORS OF ALL THEATRES! AND ALL THE PAINTERS OF THE FINE-ARTS ACADEMY”, “AND ALL THOSE WHO ARE POLITICIANS AND ARTISTS”. And once again, he deprecated “ALL THE DANTAS” of Portuguese society who shared and supported the conservative spirit of Portuguese culture and obstructed the flourishing of a modern culture – represented by the *Orpheu* group – in line with the heaving atmosphere of artistic renewal that characterized the European avant-garde.

### Almada as a performer of words

Once the *Orpheu* group had asserted itself in the intellectual milieu of Lisbon, a new chapter in the history of Portuguese culture – commonly referred to as *modernismo* – began. New opportunities were opening up new paths of experimentation which in many ways were echoing developments in the wider European scene, amongst them Marinetti’s Futurism. But contrary to what one would have expected, *Orpheu* did not unite the Portuguese modernists in a compact, clearly defined movement. Inside the group, each person took inspiration from different ‘-isms’, imitating or satirizing models, following certain principles and rejecting others. The result was, from the very beginning, a high level of heterogeneity in the brief existence of a Portuguese avant-garde, which began with *Orpheu* and finished with the seizure of *Portugal futurista*. The first period can be considered a period of synthesis in which painting and poetry were brought into a close union.<sup>20</sup> It was also a period centred on the personality of Almada Negreiros, both as an author and a historian of the Portuguese vanguard. He published books, manifestos, essays and newspaper articles. He performed a multitude of artis-

<sup>20</sup> See Almada Negreiros: *Orpheu 1915–1965*, p. 8.



tic tasks and was active in the fields of painting, literature, dance and spoken theatre. He promoted an artistic revolution and fostered links with international Futurism.

Although Santa Rita Pintor claimed that “there is only one declared Futurist in Portugal, and that is me”,<sup>21</sup> Almada Negreiros disagreed and presented himself to the Portuguese artistic and cultural milieu as “Poet of *Orpheu*, Futurist / and / Everything” (see above). Both men, obviously, considered themselves to be representatives of the Futurist movement in Portugal, or, more accurately said, as being *the* Futurist movement in Portugal. Like their friends and collaborators from *Orpheu*, they propagated a violent break with the Symbolist tradition. In fact, ‘violence’ is the appropriate word to characterize events in Portugal in 1915. Almada and his companions waged a violent battle against the forces of the past while being simultaneously engaged in highly creative tasks. In this passionate adventure, Almada Negreiros played a progressively more central rôle, especially after establishing a partnership with Santa Rita Pintor and after founding with him a Lisbon Futurist Committee (1916). During these years of turbulent skirmishes, Almada Negreiros was mainly in charge of publicity and propaganda, leaving painting in the hands of Amadeo de Souza-Cardoso, Eduardo Viana and Santa Rita Pintor. In this sense, he can certainly be considered an *actor* of Portuguese Futurism.

Almada Negreiros possessed the same avant-garde sensibility as his Spanish friend Ramón Gómez de la Serna, but lived it out in an entirely different manner. On April 1909, Ramón Gómez de la Serna had translated and published Marinetti’s *Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism* and a year later, the *Futurist Proclamation to the Spaniards*, written by Marinetti at his request. But for the time being, little more was happening in Spain except for debates in cultural magazines and newspapers.<sup>22</sup> One had to wait for the magazine *Ultra* to appear in 1921–22 before the international avant-garde became influential again in Spain, and even then it was in a rather controlled manner without any recourse to violence.

In Portugal, the reverse could be observed. In 1909–10, the international vanguard was largely unknown and in the early 1920s it had, for the most part, gone dormant again. But in 1915–17, there was a burst of activities of a furious and forceful kind. During this period, Almada Negreiros stood out as an author of manifestos that transgressed the boundaries between established genres.

<sup>21</sup> “Futurista declarado, em Portugal, há só um, que sou eu.” Santa Rita in a letter to Homem Cristo Filho, published in *A ideia nacional* 23 (4 May 1916).

<sup>22</sup> See the essays in this volume by Carola Sbriziolo: “Futurist Texts in the Madrilénian Review ‘Prometeo’, Directed by Ramón Gómez de la Serna” and Juan Herrero-Senés: “‘Polemics, jokes, compliments and insults’: The Reception of Futurism in the Spanish Press (1909–1918).”



Various typographical devices were employed to give the words a graphically sophisticated appearance and make them appear like visual poems. But they were not print products alone. Their hand-by-hand distribution modus was a form of action theatre, and when they were declaimed in front of an audience they turned into fully-fledged performances, or ‘public art’. Thus, the manifestos exemplified what Marinetti called “the violent incursion of life into art”<sup>23</sup> and what Almada Negreiros described in the *Manifesto da Exposição de Amadeo de Souza-Cardozo* (Manifesto of the Exhibition of Amadeo de Souza-Cardozo, 1916) as: “We Futurists don’t know History, we only know Life that goes by! They possess Culture, We possess Experience – and we won’t trade!”<sup>24</sup> This “experience”, which Almada also referred to as the artist’s body bursting into the field of the arts, was intended to overcome the separation of art from life.

A model for this can be found in Marinetti manifesto, *Il teatro di varietà* (The Variety Theatre, 1913), which Almada translated for *Portugal futurista* and which he declaimed at the Futurist soirée at the Teatro República on 14 April 1917. The theatre Marinetti had in mind did not exist in splendid, ivory-tower like isolation, but was “one that closely involves the audience. The latter does not sit there unmoving, like some stupid voyeur, but noisily participates in the action.” The performances are not restricted to the four walls of the stage or the theatre building, but “the action takes place on stage, in the boxes and in the stalls, all at the same time. It continues after the show is over.” Therefore, the Futurist Variety Theater “is a melting pot of the many elements of a new sensibility in the making. In it one finds an ironic decomposition of all the tired old stereotypes [... It] destroys the Solemn, the Sacred, the Serious, and the Sublime in Art with a capital A.”<sup>25</sup>

Similarly, Almada Negreiros’ manifesto operated with the notion of ‘synthesis’ and demanded a fusion of political and artistic ideas, of art and life, or literature and performance. Almada cultivated the genre of ‘manifesto declamation’ throughout his life and gave it a unique direction, which in a similar way can be found in the poem *Litoral* (Coastline, 1916; see Fig. 1), which was not an abstract poetic text or a literary score but an object-poem staged on the page. For Almada it was in the first place a performative act; it can also be described as a Futurist

<sup>23</sup> Marinetti: “In tema del futurismo”, p. 28; “On the Subject of Futurism: An Interview with ‘La Diana’”, p. 143.

<sup>24</sup> “Nós, os futuristas, não sabemos História, só conhecemos da Vida que passa por Nós. Eles têm a Cultura, Nós temos a Experiência – e não trocamos!” The manifesto, reprinted in *Textos de intervenção*, pp. 29–30, was published on the occasion of the only exhibition that Amadeo de Souza-Cardoso had in Portugal (in Porto and subsequently transferred to the Naval League in Lisbon).

<sup>25</sup> Marinetti: “The Variety Theater”, pp. 186–187.

journey full of word play and graphic artifices that makes the reader become a part of the poem, in as much as s/he must find a path through the pages.

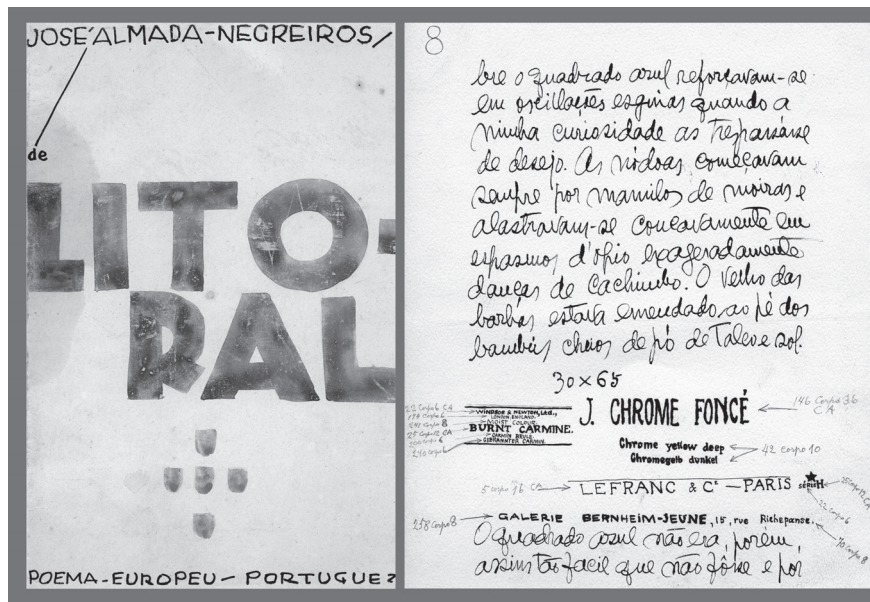


Fig. 1: Left: José de Almada Negreiros: Manuscript of *Litoral* (1916); Right: Manuscript page from *K4 O quadrado azul* (1917).

A similar concern with the visual arrangement of a literary text can be found in the satirical pamphlet *K4 O quadrado azul* (The Blue Square K4, 1917; see Fig. 1) that included the *Manifesto of the Exhibition of Amadeo de Souza-Cardoso*. On the back page of the volume, Almada placed an author's note that reoccurred in several of his subsequent publications and in which he advised the reader: "All these books should be read at least twice by those who are very intelligent, and always double by those with a lower IQ."<sup>26</sup> On the cover, the author staged a semiotic game between the title and the blue rectangular patch (see Fig. 6 in Nuno Júdice essay in this volume, p. ■), which reappears as a stamp mark throughout the narrative. Almada dedicated *K4 O quadrado azul* to Amadeo de Souza-Cardoso and dated it "Lisbon 1917 Europe 1920" – suggesting that his words would find repercussions in a time and a space still to come. The reader who follows the traces of the blue square through the pages of the book with

<sup>26</sup> "Todos estes livros devem ser lidos pelo menos duas vezes prós muito inteligentes e d'aqui pra baixo é sempre a dobrar." Almada Negreiros: *K4 O quadrado azul*. Edição fac-similada, p. 19.

the hope of finding the “untransmittable secret of genius” announced on the first page, finds a glorification of velocity and a prophecy that a machine will be invented to replicate the brain and to industrialize geniality.

The text of the pamphlet is ruled by a “me”, which, perfectly suiting Marinetti’s euphoric prediction of the perfected human being,<sup>27</sup> projects Almada’s self-glorification: “The Idolatry of Myself challenges the wheel’s right to victory [...]. My eyes are spotlights patrolling the infinite [...]. Death to Nostalgia and Passéism! Death to the static verb and to the retreating verb! [...] My Fate is the twentieth century.”<sup>28</sup> It is not by chance that these texts were intimately linked with Amadeo de Souza-Cardoso, who functioned as co-publisher of the pamphlet. The two artists shared a fascination with the Paris avant-garde, with Picasso and the Futurist aesthetics. Souza-Cardoso proclaimed: “I don’t follow any school. The schools have died. We, the innovators, are only searching for originality. Am I an Impressionist, a Cubist, a Futurist, an Abstractionist? I am a little bit of everything. But none of that adds up to a school.”<sup>29</sup>

It is clear that, from his time in Paris, Souza-Cardoso contributed to the dissemination of new ideas among the young artists of the Portuguese capital. He knew the French cultural milieu and was well-acquainted with the main artists of the time – among them the Delaunays, Modigliani (with whom he shared a study), Braque, Brancusi and Apollinaire. He absorbed the new aesthetic trends and helped to propagate them in his homeland, especially when he returned there in 1914.

Between 1915 and 1916, Sonia and Robert Delaunay took refuge in the North of Portugal and entertained amicable relations with painters and poets such as Almada Negreiros, José Pacheco and Eduardo Viana. Amadeo de Souza-Cardoso, who had been socializing with the couple in Paris, worked with them on new projects inspired by various ‘-isms’. In the correspondence between the Delaunays

<sup>27</sup> In the manifesto, *Extended Man and the Kingdom of the Machine* (1915), Marinetti formulated his dream of a technobody of the future. The heart of this “nonhuman, mechanical species” becomes “a sort of stomach of the brain, which is fed systematically, so that the spirit can embark on action”. This New Man will then be able “to externalize his will so that, like a huge invisible arm, it can extend beyond him”. *Critical Writings*, pp. 86–87.

<sup>28</sup> “A Idolatria do Eu resmunga nos búzios o direito à vitória [...]. Os meus olhos são holofotes a policiar o infinito[...]”Morra a Saudade e o regresso! Morra o verbo parar e o verbo recuar! [...] A minha Fortuna é o Século XX.” Almada Negreiros: *K4 O quadrado azul*. Edição fac-similada, pp. 10–17.

<sup>29</sup> “Eu não sigo escola alguma. As escolas morreram. Nós, os novos, só procuramos agora a originalidade. Sou impressionista, cubista, futurista, abstracionista? De tudo um pouco. Mas nada disso forma uma escola.” Amadeo in an interview with João Moreira de Almeida: “Uma exposição original.” *O dia*, 4 December 1916.

and the four Portuguese artists we read about their ambitious projects which never went beyond the drawing board stage: the formation of an Artistic Action Group, itinerant exhibitions and an Album of “colour poems”.<sup>30</sup> The Delaunays functioned as a catalyst of Modernism in Portugal and provided inspiration and stimulus to their artist friends. Almada Negreiros, fascinated by Sonia Delaunay, wrote her enthusiastic letters, true poem-letters, almost in *parolibera* style, in which he declared his profound admiration for her creative talent. He also reported to her on his own work, his yearnings and his plans for several “ballets simultanistes”. In one of these letters, Almada Negreiros mentioned that he was going to send her the *Manifesto Anti-Dantas e por extenso* and announced a “Ballet Véronèse et Bleu (en preparation) – A Mme. Sonia Delaunay-Terk” and “Poèmes Portugais par Madame Delaunay-Terk et Jose de Almada-Negreiros “, projects that in the end did not materialize.

During this period, Almada finished his novel *A engomadeira* (The Ironing Girl)<sup>31</sup> and dedicated it to Sonia Delaunay, calling her his “teacher”.<sup>32</sup> Passionate about colour, she followed the schools of Fauvism, Expressionism, Cubism, Futurism from early on, and, together with her husband Robert, developed Orphism, a technique of pictorial simultaneism, which Almada adopted in the subtitle of his *Salimbancos: Contrastes simultâneos* (Acrobats: Simultaneous Contrasts, 1917). Some of Almada’s publications from this time (e.g. *A engomadeira*, *Chez moi* or *Os ingleses fumam cachimbo*) were written in a manner that from today’s perspective seem to anticipate Surrealism. Here, words are freed not only from their linear graphic bonds, but also from the restrictions of logic and grammar. Thus, Almada Negreiros’s vanguard œuvre developed into a worthy companion piece to Pessoa’s Intersectionist speculations and Sá-Carneiro’s vertiginist Sensationism.

## The one and only Futurist performance in Lisbon

Until 1917, Portuguese Futurism was a localized and isolated phenomenon and did not amount to a movement as such. Almada Negreiros and Santa Rita Pintor tried to change that situation by promoting Marinetti’s ideas in a major public event. On 14 April 1917, they organized a Futurist soirée at the Teatro República

<sup>30</sup> See Ferreira: *Correspondance de quatre artistes portugais*, pp. 61–219.

<sup>31</sup> According to a letter written to José Pacheco on 16 November 1917, the work was completed on 7 January 1915. See *Obra literária de José de Almada Negreiros*. Vol 2. *Ficções*. p. 9.

<sup>32</sup> “Em todos os meus trabalhos eu guardo esta página para dizer o orgulho de ter como Mestre Mme. Sonia Delaunay-Terk.” *Obra literária de José de Almada Negreiros*. Vol 2. *Ficções*, p. 10.

(nowadays Teatro S. Luís, in Lisbon), in which Almada Negreiros appeared on stage in an extravagant costume that he himself designed and that looked like a clownish mix between an aviation suit and a workman's overall (see Fig. ■ on p.■). He declaimed his *Ultimatum futurista às gerações portuguesas do século XX* (Futurist Ultimatum to the Portuguese Generations of the Twentieth Century), occasionally punctuated by improvised interventions from Santa Rita Pintor. The word 'ultimatum' was at that time still associated with the English Ultimatum of 1890 (see p.■ in this volume) and was thus far more charged than the word 'manifesto'. 'Ultimatum' suggested to the Portuguese in 1917 a threat, or even the use of force, should certain demands not be met. Almada's *Ultimatum futurista* contained similar warnings and an aggressive sermon against the lethargy in which the country found itself: "It's not my fault that I'm Portuguese, but I strongly feel that I should not to be a coward like yourselves and let my homeland rot."<sup>33</sup> Judging by the report that Almada later published on the event in *Portugal futurista*, the noisy celebration shocked the public because of the "virility" of his statements inspired by "Marinetti's revelations", but also aroused in them "an idea of the intensity of modern life".<sup>34</sup> Almada Negreiros and Santa Rita Pintor were satisfied with the result, and were more determined than ever to drum up support for the creation of a "Portuguese homeland of the twentieth century".<sup>35</sup>

Days after the performance, the newspaper *A capital* published a letter in which José de Almada Negreiros thanked the Lisbon press for their "Futurist companionship" and announced that soon there would be a "practical and positive Futurist show".<sup>36</sup> Such a performance never took place. But in November of the same year, the only issue of *Portugal futurista* came out and printed translations of the *Manifesto of Futurist Painters* by Boccioni, Carrà, Russolo, Balla and Severini, the *Manifesto of Lust* by Valentine de Saint-Point and Marinetti's *The Variety Theatre*, as well as excerpts from other texts by Marinetti, Boccioni and Carrà. Pessoa, using his heteronym Álvaro de Campos, presented an *Ultimatum*, which was as bold, or even more so, than the one written by Almada. Santa Rita

33 "Eu não tenho culpa nenhuma de ser português, mas sinto a força para não ter, como vós outros, a cobardia de deixar apodrecer a pátria." Almada Negreiros: "Ultimatum futurista às gerações portuguesas do século XX."

34 "Consegui, inspirado na revelação de Marinetti e apoiado no genial optimismo da minha juventude, transpor essa bitola de insipidez em que se gasta Lisboa inteira, e atingir ante a curiosidade da plateia a expressão da intensidade da vida moderna, sem dúvida de todas as revelações a que é mais distante de Portugal." Almada Negreiros: "1ª conferência futurista."

35 "Vós, oh portugueses da minha geração, nascidos como eu no ventre da sensibilidade europeia do século XX criai a pátria portuguesa do século XX." Almada Negreiros: "Ultimatum futurista às gerações portuguesas do século XX."

36 Almada Negreiros: "A ideia futurista na ribalta."



Almada Negreiros also contributed a text jointly written with Ruy Coelho and José Pacheco on “Os Bailados Russos em Lisboa” (The Ballets Russes in Lisbon), with a note attached that lists all ballets supposedly produced by the three authors. This sheet had previously been distributed in Lisbon and then pasted into *Portugal futurista* to serve as pages 1–2 of the journal.

Fifteen days after its publication, the magazine was apprehended by the police. The *Ultimatum* by Álvaro de Campos seems to have contributed, in good part, to that act of repression, as it screamed out in large-size, bold capital letters, “MERDA!” (SHIT!) A similar affront to common notions of decency was *Mima-Fatáxa* with its utterly indecorous glorification of Salome’s exotic eroticism.





*Portugal futurista* was a publication that on the page may have looked like a clown's game – Santa Rita photographed in a fool's outfit and Almada Negreiros in an outlandish aviator's costume – but which at the blink of an eye had turned serious. Santa Rita Pintor and Almada Negreiros, who embodied Lisbon's Futurist Committee and were the key-figures of this magazine, this fell victim to an act of ruthless censorship.

A year later, Portuguese Futurism lost two of its key members: Santa Rita Pintor and Amadeo de Souza-Cardoso passed away in 1918, following Mário de Sá Carneiro, who in 1916 had committed suicide in Paris. The explosion of creative energy, which had been rung in by *Orpheu* and brought to a climax with *Portugal futurista*, began to fade. Almada Negreiros and Pessoa survived the many ruptures and discontinuities, but left to their own devices they could not warrant the survival of the Futurist movement in Portugal. Nonetheless, the brief and violent incursion of the avant-garde left its traces in their subsequent artistic production and in the aesthetic formulation of a Portuguese Modernist art.

## Les Ballets Portugais

After the folding of *Portugal futurista* and before moving to Paris in 1919 (see below), Almada Negreiros dedicated himself again to the terpsichorean art, which he considered “the finest expression of Art”.<sup>38</sup> Almost as a last impulse to gather enthusiasm for and contribute to the development of Portuguese Modernism, Almada set up a dance group made up of friends from high society and supported by an aristocratic patron, the countess Helena Maria da Silveira de Vasconcelos e Sousa (1889- ?), daughter of the seventh Marquesa de Castelo Melhor, who had already financed Almada's second ballet, *O sonho da princesa da rosa* (The Dream of the Princess of Roses),<sup>39</sup> which was performed in the gardens of her Palácio da Rosa on 7 March 1916.

Almada Negreiros's interest in dance had been greatly stimulated by the reports on the Ballets Russes, first from his friends who were living in Paris, and then by Sonia Delaunay, who inspired him to devise the (unperformed)

<sup>38</sup> “Os BAILADOS RUSSOS são a melhor expressão de Arte que hoje te podemos aconselhar porque eles explicar-te-ão a Sublime Simplicidade da Vida onde tu, Português, vives ignorantemente crucificado.” Almada Negreiros: “Os Bailados Russos em Lisboa”, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> The ballet *A princesa dos sapatos de ferro* tells the story of a cursed princess, who must dance every night with the devil until she wears out seven pairs of iron shoes. Besides being the choreographer and costume designer, Almada Negreiros danced the parts of the witch and the devil. Ruy Coelho was the composer and José Pacheco the scenographer.



*Ballet Véronèse et Bleu*. Therefore, when he heard that Diaghilev was taking his company from Madrid to Lisbon, he presented himself as a potential collaborator in November 1917 in the already mentioned essay in *Portugal futurista*.

Diaghilev's Iberian tour was largely determined by the fact that the outbreak of the First World War had nearly ruined his company. In August 1914, he dissolved the Ballets Russes and retired to Italy, where he spent the next half-year setting up a new troupe with a new repertoire under the choreographic direction of Léonide Massine. At that time he became intimately acquainted with Futurism. According to Lynn Garafola, this encounter was of fundamental importance for the aesthetic foundation of his new company around 1915 to 1917.<sup>40</sup> The most intense period of the Futurist collaboration with the Ballets Russes was February-April 1917: Diaghilev was adamant: "We can't be less modern than Marinetti. Futurism, Cubism, is the last word. I do not want to let the position of an artistic leader slip away from me."<sup>41</sup> But while he was forging an auspicious alliance with Marinetti, his second company was suffering record losses in the United States. Diaghilev was therefore all too happy to accept an invitation from the Spanish King Alfonso XIII for a performance in Madrid. Their second Spanish season lasted from 2 June to 1 July 1917, and in the autumn they returned to present their modernist masterpiece, *Parade* (5–29 November 1917). However, box office entries were low and, at the end of the run, the company was practically broke. Several dancers defected, and to survive the dire winter of 1917, the remaining troupe decamped to Lisbon.

They arrived on 2 December 1917 and were met at the station by Almada Negreiros and José Pacheco. However, as the first performances were to be held in a circus-like theatre usually attended by the popular classes, the traditional ballet audiences from the upper classes stayed away. Diaghilev's financial situation could not have been worse:

The saison of the Ballets Russes in Portugal may be counted amongst the poorest the company ever had. Lydia Sokolova (Hilda Munnings), in her memories, *Dancing with Diaghilev*, recalls the Lisbon performances as the worse they ever gave.<sup>42</sup>

A major contributing factor to this dire situation was the military uprising, on 5 December 1917, against Afonso Costa's democratically elected government. Massine and Diaghilev, accompanied by Almada, were caught off-guard by the

<sup>40</sup> Garafola: *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes*, pp. 75–78. A similar view is expressed by Martin: "The Ballet 'Parade': A Dialogue Between Cubism and Futurism." The details of Diaghilev's collaboration with the Italian Futurists have been analysed in Berghaus: *Italian Futurist Theatre*.

<sup>41</sup> See Nijinsky: *Nijinsky*, p. 360.

<sup>42</sup> Gil: "Heaviness and the Modernist Aesthetics of Movement," p. 99.



Fig. 2: “Futuriste N.C.5”, one of the handwritten cards (1918) by José de Almada Negreiros.

street fighting and had to entrench themselves in the hotel Avenida Palace. The Ballet Russes had reached their nadir and were stranded for three months in Portugal before being able to return to Spain at the end of March 1918.

Seen from the perspectives the Russians, the winter of 1917–18 was a period of debility and decline; however, for Almada, the contact with Diaghilev and Massine reinforced his urge to commit himself wholeheartedly to dance. He had been socializing with a group of young ladies from high society, with whom he formed a club, the “N.C.5”. They were moved by a passion for dance, but also for theatre, music, literature and the arts in general. The correspondence between the five of them, which still remains unpublished, includes poems, calligrams and epistolary narratives animated by a modernist sensibility.

Several of the works that circulated within that club can only be deciphered by means of a colour code: yellow stands for Lalá (Maria Adelaide Burnay Soares Cardoso), red for Zeka (Maria José Burnay Soares Cardoso), blue for Tatão (Maria da Conceição de Mello Breyner) and violet for Treca (Maria Madalena Moraes Amado), green for Zu (Almada Negreiros). This personal, even secret, aspect quickly became a theatrical act and was undoubtedly connected to the aforementioned histrionic disposition of Almada Negreiros. The need for a key to understand these poems makes the group’s play with images and words susceptible to having all sorts of hidden meanings be read into them. The riddles require keys which we do not possess. But as nothing can be taken at face value, we are constantly forced to presume the existence of another reality, that is, a reality of freed images and words.

Some of these riddles can be found on small, handwritten cards, dated October 1918, on which Almada named his club “Futuriste N.C.5”.<sup>43</sup> On a pack of graphic poems written in French (“commandements”), he drafted the programme of a Futurist action to be executed by himself and his four friends:

1er. C’est défendu d’être bête. / 2ème. Il faut se donner pour se trouver. / 3ème. Accomplir n’est vaincre. / 4ème. Nous n’existons que pour être Le Plus Grand. / 5ème. Vaincre ou disparaître, pas de nuances. / AVANTAGES: / SIMPLICITÉ / SOLIDITÉ / FONCTIONNEMENT CHRONOMÉTRIQUE / MAXIMUM DE LUMIÈRE / MAXIMUM D’ECONOMIE / MINIMUM D’USURE / MINIMUM D’ENCOMBREMENT.<sup>44</sup>

1<sup>st</sup> It is forbidden to be silly. / 2<sup>nd</sup> One has to give all to receive all. / 3<sup>rd</sup> To accomplish does not mean to win. / 4<sup>th</sup> We only exist in order to be The Greatest. / 5<sup>th</sup> Winning or vanishing, nothing in-between. / ADVANTAGES: SIMPLICITY / SOLIDITY / PRECISELY TIMES FUNCTIONING / A MAXIMUM OF LIGHT / A MAXIMUM OF ECONOMY / MINIMUM WEAROUT / MINIMUM OBSTRUCTION.”

<sup>43</sup> Lisboa, Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, Espólio Almada Negreiros, N15–5.

<sup>44</sup> França: *Amadeo & Almada*, p. 219.

In these texts, as well as in the manuscript, *N.C.5 – Invention vert. Important notice intransmissible* (NC5 – Green Invention. Unassignable Important Notice), dated 21 July 1918 and written in green ink, the colour of Almada, there is a touching reminiscence of Almada's Futurism in as much as he declared himself in it as being a "VERT FUTURISTE" (Green Futurist), repeating the verb "Penser" (to think) in different typographic sizes in the manner of a slogan.

Although the artistic productions of the group lacked professional profile – the dancers who took part in it were all inexperienced youngsters – their artistic direction was highly skilled, with Almada Negreiros acting as choreographer, Ruy Coelho as composer and José Pacheco and Raul Lino supplying the scenery. Almada Negreiros was also in charge of the costumes, led the rehearsals and danced some of the rôles (e.g. the Witch and the Devil in *A princesa dos sapatos de ferro*). During 1918, several performances took place:

- *Bailado do encantamento* (The Ballet of Enchantment) and *A princesa dos sapatos de ferro* (The Princess with the Iron Shoes) at the Teatro de São Carlos (10, 19 and 21 April 1918)
- *Jardim da Pierrette* (Pierrette's Garden), with music by Grieg and Chopin and a libretto by Maria Madalena Moraes Amado, at the Teatro da Trindade (21 June 1918). Almada acted as choreographer, set and costume designer, and also produced an illustrated programme.
- *Sonho do estatuário* (The Statue's Dream) at the open-air garden theatre of the Palácio da Quinta das Laranjeiras (in the summer of 1918). Almada acted as choreographer.

In 1919, Almada's enthusiasm for ballet began to fade. He had to discover that 'dancing in iron shoes' was an apt metaphor for his attempt at trying to lift modern art off the ground in the backward cultural waters of Portugal. He therefore left Lisbon for Paris, probably also because some of his closest friends and colleagues had died and because of the unstable and unsafe political situation in Portugal (after the monarchy's restoration was proclaimed on 19 January 1919, a civil war had broken out which eventually ended with a military victory of the Republican forces). Almada arrived in Paris at the end of January and worked for a while as a ballroom dancer. He managed to interest the collector and gallerist Alphonse Kahn in his work and entertained amicable relations with Max Jacob, Pablo Picasso and Constantin Brancusi. To earn some money, he moved for a while to Biarritz, where he worked as a public relations manager, escort of High Society ladies and dancer in the nightclub Patapoom, run by his old friend Homem Christo Filho. After the summer season, he returned to Paris, this time hiring out as a factory labourer producing light bulbs. Despite this precarious and unfulfilling existence, Almada managed to write several literary works such as *Mon oreiller* (My Pillow), *Histoire*





Fig. 3: José de Almada Negreiros in 1921.

*du Portugal par cœur* (A History of Portugal Written from Memory) and *Os ingleses fumam cachimbo* (The English Smoke Pipe). He also stayed in epistolary contact with his aristocratic friends from the club “N.C.5”.

In the following years, many of his texts made allusions to his group, codified in the colours of the girls: *parva 1 (em Latim)* (stupid 1 [in Latin]); *História verde (autêntica)* (Green Story [Authentic]); *A invenção do dia claro* (The Invention of the Bright Day); *Pierrot e Arlequim* (Pierrot and Harlequin). When, on his 27th birthday on 7 April 1920, Almada returned to Lisbon, everything seemed to have changed, to have become smaller.<sup>45</sup> On the outside, he appeared to have mellowed, to have found a way of arranging himself with the cultural backwardness of Portugal. But on 2 June 1921, the *Diário de Lisboa* published a text by him, “Um futurista dirige-se a uma senhora” (A Futurist Addresses a Lady), in which he declared: “Systems were made so that we exceed them; all systems, even Futurism.”<sup>46</sup> Deep inside, Almada Negreiros was still a rebel; so he managed to exceed Futurism, at least the form of Futurism that had aligned itself with Fascism, that had a surrendered to the academy and that had lost the aesthetic vitality it had once preached.

Proof of Almada’s disenchantment with Futurism can be found in the text, *Um ponto no i do Futurismo* (Setting Things Straight with Futurism), published in the *Diário de Lisboa* at a time when Marinetti was visiting Portugal (1932). It was signed “in the name of the Portuguese Futurists” and announced that Marinetti’s presence in the Portuguese capital demonstrated that “the declared enemies of Futurism have won the day”. Marinetti did not address his Portuguese followers, did not mention the Futurist actions they had carried out, did not present himself as a revolutionary artist, but rather as *accademico*. Almada Negreiros concluded: “The Portuguese Futurists – because they once existed and they still exist today – think that what Marinetti brought them [...] is 23 years and one day old.”<sup>47</sup> And his friend, Fernando Pessoa, expressed a similar sense of frustration and contempt in the poem, *Marinetti, the Academician* (see Nuno Júdice’s essay in this volume).

Despite this disappointment, in 1933 Almada gave a lecture, *Arte e artistas*, in which he summed up his idea of Futurism in a rather affirmative manner: “The disagreeable impression that the word Futurism evokes in some people is like the fear of the unknown that seizes small children when, for the first time, they run away from home and already after ten meters get worried that they won’t find

<sup>45</sup> See Almada Negreiros: “Impressões da chegada a Lisboa do enviado especial do nosso club em Paris.” Originally included in volume 1 of *Parva (em Latim)*, and reprinted in *Ficções*, p. 86.

<sup>46</sup> “Os sistemas foram feitos para isto, para nós sobejarmos deles; todos os sistemas, até o Futurismo.” Almada Negreiros: *Artigos no “Diário de Lisboa”*, p. 34.

<sup>47</sup> Almada Negreiros: “Um ponto no i do futurismo.”

their way back!”<sup>48</sup> Maybe it can be said of Almada Negreiros that he, even without declaring himself a ‘Futurist’, even despite feeling disillusioned with Marinetti, even despite the inevitable turning of the Great Wheel of Existence, remained a Futurist. This, at least, is my understanding of the fact that shortly before his death he exhibited a last big painting at the Fundação Gulbenkian (in 1969), and called it *Começar* (Beginning).

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<sup>48</sup> “A impressão desagradável que provoca nalguns a palavra futurismo é como os petizes que fogem de casa pela primeira vez e aos dez metros já têm medo de não saberem voltar para casa!” Almada Negreiros: “Arte e artistas”, p. 200.



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