

**"To Wright in European". The poem "Manicure" by Mário de Sá-Carneiro  
as an example of the European Avant-Garde.**

The creative development (1912 – 1916) and the life journey (1890 – 1916) of the Portuguese poet and prose writer Mário de Sá-Carneiro, despite its "lightning" speed and shortness – three and a half years out of 25 years of life - represents not less than a bright flash of originality. The years of his poetic art beginning - 1912 – 1913 - were the very height of the world-wide pursuits and a new approach in art, science, policy and in the other spheres of social life. Namely in the year of 1912 there was a meeting of two talented writers which became life-changing for the development of all the following Portuguese literature: Mário de Sá-Carneiro and Fernando Pessoa. They were founders of so called "generation of "Orpheu|" – a small group of poets and painters combined in the period of 1912 to 1915 in Lisbon on the ground of general dissatisfaction of previous aesthetic tradition. Their desperate searches and courageous ideas insisted on a manifestation and such a manifestation became a magazine "Orpheu" issued from March till June of 1915. "Orpheu" *is the sum and synthesis of all the modern literary trends*, - confirmed Álvaro de Campos, one of the main Fernando Pessoa's heteronym.

In 1915 Fernando Pessoa wrote about the high rise of the art defining tasks for the new literary magazine: *"We are not Portugueses that write for Portugueses. (...) We are Portugueses that write for Europe, for the whole civilization"*. The idea about integration into the European aesthetic tradition was shaped and supported by Pessoa's friend and like-minded person Mário de Sá-Carneiro, who lived the biggest part of his life in Paris – a capital city of the European Avant-Garde: *"You are right, my dear Pessoa, all that we need now is to have a little bit of Europe in our soul"*.

The second issue of the "Orpheu" magazine was edited completely by F. Pessoa and M. de Sá-Carneiro, cubofuturistic illustrations for it were made by Santa-Rita Pintor, a cover was designed by José Pacheco, who materialized here some "achievements" of the Avant-Garde aesthetics: the type is a demonstrative

picture of "typographic revolution" praised by the futurists; the numeric characters are a bright example of the "numeral beauty" thesis.

The main point in this magazine's issue according to the statement of one of the participants is *"the meeting of literature and art in "Orpheu", each of them with its own unlimited series of "-isms". This feature of "Orpheu" is a feature of our modernity"*. A pioneering magazine came into the market in the summer of 1915, drew immediately a big response in the society and provoked a great scandal, mainly by its eccentricity unusual for the Portuguese measured life, irony and wish to shock readers. A special indignation among the respectable Portuguese public was caused by 267 unrhymed lines of the poem "Manicure" by the "calmest" rebel Mário de Sá-Carneiro.

The poem "Manicure" is a dynamic writing that answers the purposes of the Avant-Garde aesthetics and at the same time is very chamber: in the poem there is almost no classical unity of place (a café in Lisbon), time (early morning in May) and action that has its place in the poet's imagination and unfolds consistently. However at the very beginning the narration is quite calm, dynamism grows consistently and increases to the end of the writing. The author combines here the features of the outside world, feverish and heady capital with the new time progress and the feeling in his inner life. The poet sits in a café in the morning and begins to dream pushing off the any visual, sound and other influences of the outside world: tables, cups, banks, mirror reflection, effect of light in a shopwindow, fragments of telephone conversation, crash of weigh boxes, titles of latest newspapers.

In his sensitive imagination tables and chairs fly up into the air, are refracted into the plain fragments, bend outlines and are convolved into the strange geometric combinations. For the describing of his feeling and experience the poet uses not only the network of different flatnesses, but using the opportunities of literary discourse paints an active dynamic picture. A reader feels almost physically the movement of materia in space as if he is placed in the center of the composition. The young poet who knows the innovative poetry of G. Apollinaire

well, his speeches in defence of the new art uses a figurative code that is characterized for analytical cubism: nominal background, deformation of real proportion, atomism of big items, expressly angularity of forms, where however visual recognizability of depicted figure is kept.

The poet's reflection continues to rise. For a minute he lowers his eyes and sees his *"banal porcelain cup"* makes its outlines thinner, it means the lines of founding environment become thinner, the colours reach the extreme intensity and in the combinations they give *"fantastic colorations"*.

Like reflecting the evolution of pursuits in the cubism and pushing off the ideas of Apollinaire the author imagines the same picture of items in a cafe in Lisbon but now in the visual representation of Orphic cubism or Orphism (a term of G. Apollinaire) requiring an extremely outline camber of a depicted item and a special attention to the change of colour. According to M.J. German: the poetry at the beginning of the XX century is noted by *"greater radicalism"*. *New rhythms and systems of metaphors, neologisms, searches for basically new language (Apollinaire, Krucheni, Mayakovsky, Khlebnikov) brought the poets together with the artists of the Avant-Garde in many ways"*. Having shown the aesthetic evolution of cubism (analytical, Orphic), Sá-Carneiro addresses to the most radical Avant-Garde movement - futurism. For the first time an open dispatch to the futurism appears in the 75<sup>th</sup> verse. This enthusiastic manifest is supported by a gloat over usual and rude items at first sight – device for transport of goods. According to V.S. Turchin, *"... the Avant-Garde conducts a continuous dialogue with a common life making an expansion into the world of science, technology, policy, mythology, cultural traditions etc."*. However the poet here not only admires the practical achievements of the new world following the futurists but also enjoys the reality and tries to see beauty here.

Futurist conception implies, among other things, predominance of the external world, urban environment, which praises "Brave New World". The external world is excessively presented in the "Manicure" by metonymic transfer: perrons and platforms, weigh boxes and chests, newspapers and advertising logos. For the first

time Sá-Carneiro's reality in many of its sides invades the pages of the writing. Having lost its negative meaning of "banal", the reality becomes the subject of reflection. Here the external space extends till "the whole Europe" and it is obviously demonstrated by "insertions" of the main advertising logos of that time, which presented the products up-to-date for the author. Among those the following was found: bouillon cubes widely used mostly among German soldiers during the First World War, as well as perfume "COTY", and banks, such as "*CRÉDIT LYONNAIS*", which had Mário de Sá-Carneiro among its customers. Also here can be found the names of the rail way companies, signs on the weigh boxes, which imitate stenciled letters: **FRÁGIL! FRÁGIL!**, Numbers of trains and directions: **843 – AG LISBON, 492 – WR MADRID**, which is perceived as a symbol of conquered space and new speed – the results of the technical progress of the beginning of the XX century. *"Here, [in "Manicure" - M.M.] Sá-Carneiro seems not to follow the unspoken principle that the external world generally does not interest him as a subject of lyrics. In the following piece the whole subject is taken from reality"*. The next stage of implementing futuristic conception is related to the principle of "printing revolution". A foreigner comes to sit at the next table and opens the newspaper. And the poet starts to pick first separate letters, headlines of articles, company logos printed by various fonts, and then the variety of the world presented by them all.

Sá-Carneiro smoothly includes in the process of the poem development printing letters, fonts, and signs:



Collages from newspaper headings, cut out pieces, logos, advertisements and bright signs in different languages. All this obviously demonstrates the thought of his generation about "writing in the European language", and creates a feeling of the artistic onomatopoeia and information "noise" of the modern times. The concept of actuality is realized on the lexical level as well. In the poem there are

several bright references to the modern to the author epoch: "*Gritos de actual e Comércio & Indústria*", where English sign "&" ("and") is used in the meaning of the copulative conjunction "and", and an English expression "*up-to-date*" is used instead of the synonymic Portuguese "*actual*": "*Ó estética futurista – up-to-date das marcas comerciais*". Poet also uses a new and fashionable for its time word "puzzle": "*Os "puzzle" frívolos da pontuação*". Novelty of this word is shown in the way it is written in the quotation marks in the singular form, and only an article indicates the plural form.

Futurists thought that in the conditions of the rapid changes in the world the best way to reduce the long description and argument is to replace worlds with math signs, figures, etc, which also satisfied our need in accuracy. The sixth point of "Technical manifest of the futurist literature" encouraged to get rid of the syntax. In order to show the flow of the phrase and indicate the intonation, math signs, as well as music signs should be used.

The author introduces in the poem "Manicure" figures and math signs, accompanying them after the futurists with an expression: "*Ascensão da Beleza Numérica!*"

1.3.4.5.6.      7      8 8  
          7      4      4      5 6      1 1 1  
          7      0 1 3      5 9 6      5 5 0 0      ∞ ∞ ∞  
          2      1 3      1 1 1      5 5 0 0      ∞ ∞ ∞  
          2      1 3      1 1 1      5 5 0 0      ∞ ∞ ∞

The figures are placed in the special aesthetic (dis)order: either in the way of the peculiar radio wave, or imitating the real ocean waves – because very shortly before "Manicure" was created telegraph cables were pulled over the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean.

At the same time it is a persistent stressing on the wave nature of the sounds and observing the beauty of figures. Although Marinetti uses typically "standard" math signs, Sá-Carneiro goes further and completes his "formula" with a math sign of infinity, which symbolizes unlimited space and boundless communication. All this reminds of the futuristic trend of adoring modern technical achievements (Radio technology), beauty and energy. Simultaneously, such a placement of

figures graphically reminds of the music note recording, as it has five lines like in the musical staff, and on the left there are five figures printed from bottom to the top, which reminds of the musical clef stating the tone for the acoustic wave.

Poets promoting futurism tend to join a word and an image. Compositions and writings of Marinetti, Djovorni and Sanyallo were characterized by graphical nature of combining words, presenting various geometric configurations. This principle of graphic depiction of lines, expressions is shown in Sá-Carneiro's as well. A vivid example in such a case can be a following poem line: "*É no ar que ondeia tudo! É lá que tudo existe!...*". It is printed in the shape of wave, thus adding to its semantic content simultaneously visual reflection of the meaning. It is an illustration of the principle of "word in freedom", when a word is freed not only from a rhyme, but is also free from a linear construction of the text. In one of the letters to Pessoa Sá-Carneiro answers to the call of futurists to use sound symbolism: "*- In the "Sagod" galleria, the temple of cubists and futurists, which I told you about in one of the latest letters, I bought yesterday an addition of "I Poeti Futuristi". This is an anthology, where Marinetti and many other poets are printed: Mariu Betuda, Libero Altomare and others (...). There I found Fu fu... cri-cri... cucurucu... Is-holá..etc – highly recommended. We shall see..."*".

At the end of the poem, close to the "words freed", the poet uses interjections and sound imitations, growing in size letters to symbolize the intensity of emotions. This sound imitating polyphony - and it is viewed exactly this way by all researches of Sá-Carneiro poetry - a hooligan act can be seen, an action, typical for all futurism disciples. If you look closely to the growing sounds, callings, among them a separate semantic units as well as existing words and phrases can be found. For example a third line "*FUTSCH! FUTSCH!*" is a German expression, which is used as an interjection here and could be adequately translated as "away". The last and the brightest speech "*PRÁ Á K K !...*" is simply a little "covered" beginning of a rude jargon expression, not announced curse, in which the strongest semantic part is not said but easily understood. This is the most vivid in all meanings

example of using futuristic aesthetics – the poet goes to the street cursing, attracting attention by such a behavior and provoking a scandal around him.

The poem "Manicure" can not be called a creation of futurism in its full meaning. All researches who touch upon the topic of Sá-Carneiro's styles and review the poem "Manicure" call this writing "half-futuristic", which is partly fair. In fact, the most vivid futurism demonstration is in the so-called second part of the poem. Nevertheless, all its content tells about futurism indirectly. The poem is written in the present tense, and thus means the present moment - the starting point for futurists from which they head to the future. Fernando Pessoa after the death (suicide, death) of his friend and giving resume on their mutual literary adventure related to the magazine "Orpheus" said: " - *Among us, pioneers of the magazine, only Sá-Carneiro, although not being a futurist, taught us about futurism ...*".

Also in the text of the poem Sá-Carneiro includes the artistic-math formula as a result of the Avant-Garde art development:

***Marinetti + Picasso = Paris <***

***< Santa Rita Pintor + Fernando Pessoa Álvaro de Campos!!!!***

Here Sá-Carneiro chooses the most important and fundamental principles not only for the European Avant-Garde, but also for him personally, as for a disciple of the new aesthetics. It includes in the condensed form reflection about various "isms": of the Avant-Garde art: Marinetti – messenger of futurism, Picasso – absolute leader of cubism, it sums as Paris – the capital of the European Avant-Garde and bohemia. But even taken together they are less than the painting talent of Santa-Rita Pintor, theories of Fernando Pessoa and poetic experiences of Alvaro de Campos - representatives of "Orpheus" generation who aimed at the general integrated cover of aesthetics.

Brazilian researcher Gilberto Mendoza in his book "European Avant-Garde and Brazilian modernism" places "Manicure" Mário de Sá-Carneiro along with the most talented writing of the time, such as "Correspondences" of Charles Baudelaire, "The alchemy of words" Rimbaud, "Poetic art" of Verlaine, "Manifestation of symbolism" by Moreas, Mallarme, manifests of futurism,

cubism, Dadaism, surrealism of Marinetti, Apollinaire, Tzara, Breton, "Slap to the public taste" of Russian cubists-futurists D.Burliuk, Mayakovsky, Khlebnikov. The poem here is not only an original writing of the poet, but a manifestation of a "Portuguese Avant-Garde" in its context of the general European cultural tradition of the beginning of the XX century.