

Lisbon, Lisbon: A brief reading of Gallant Lisbon, by Fialho de Almeida

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ABSTRACT

The modern city invention and its urbanization exerted great fascination among literati, origination new sociabilities, as urban areas became an intense, conflicting and a contradictory space. Walter Benjamin (1994), in Baudelaire's studies on literary modernity, states that the city itself emerges on book pages, magazines and newspapers, giving rise to the vogue for panoramic literature and, thus, cities began to be immortalized through the writers' pens: just as Charles Baudelaire invents Paris in the 19th century, Lisbon is read and written by Julio Cesar Machado, Eça de Queiroz, Cesário Verde, Fialho de Almeida, among others. Then, our purpose in this study is to make some considerations about Lisbon City representations in Fialho de Almeida's Gallant Lisbon work, from his chronicles: "Old Lisbon and New Lisbon", "The streets – The shop window devil – the pink adultery" and "At night", seeking to highlight the urban space from different aspects, such as: daily life, leisure, the modern equipment advent and how these changes were captured by literature.

KEYWORDS: Portuguese Literature. 19th Century. Modernity. City.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The modern city engendered the norms of the capitalist mode production, with its dissonances and conflicts as well. This urban phenomenon configuration, generated in modernity, was directly associated with the capitalist market development and, in fact, the modern city took shapes and layouts that distinguished it from other agglomeration previous types when we think of a new urban sensitivity generation and perception.

In this work, we aim at reflecting on the relationship between literature and the city, thinking the literary discourse as a source for representing the city, from the reading of Fialho de Almeida⁴'s chronicles and his episodes of *Gallant Lisbon*, emphasizing the chronicles "Old Lisbon and New Lisbon", "The streets – The shop window devil – the pink adultery" and "At night", which contrasts with the Vice City in which Lisbon is portrayed as a space of opposition between the countryside and the city.

A brief analysis will be made considering the *flâneur* narrator's visions about Lisbon City, in the course of his time, in a contrast between past and future, emphasizing his sensory experiences, that describe the metropolis' colors and atmospheres.

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II. “OLD LISBON AND NEW LISBON”: BETWEEN THE OLD AND THE MODERN URBAN PLACE

In the social imaginary at the end of the 19th century/beginning of the 20th century, literature established a discourse on the urban, expressing the conflicts, experiences, individuals and the way they relate to each other regarding this space. Featuring the Portuguese modernity is to reflect on a peripheral modernity type, as Marshal Berman points out on Russian modernization, in his book: *All that is solid melts itself in thin air*.

According to George Simmel's surmise, in his text - *The metropolis and the mental life*, the impact of the urban changes of the 1800s on social imagination was noteworthy, establishing a diverse sociability which came to generate new ways of living and behaving in the city:

Cities are, firstly, the head office of the highest economic division of labor. Therefore, they produce phenomena as extreme as, in Paris, the paid occupation of the 'fourteenth'. These are people who identify themselves through signals in their houses and who are ready, at dinnertime, correctly dressed, so that they can be quickly summoned if a dinner consists of thirteen people. As it expands, the city offers more and more decisive conditions for labor division. It offers a circle that, through its size, can absorb a highly diversified variety of services (SIMMEL, 1976, p.21-22).

Modernity was characterized as predominantly urban, and much of the literature started focusing on the city, establishing an opposition between the countryside and the metropole, so well discussed by Raymond Williams, in his work - *The Countryside and the City in History and Literature*, which points out that this relationship was largely due to the process of production and circulation of ideas and texts, from the Press development, publishers and the creation of bookstores as well.

In Portugal, in the context of the 1800s, we can observe that from 1820 onwards, the so-called Liberal Revolution took place in Portuguese lands, whose clashes happened between conservatives and liberals. However, as José Tengarrinha asserts, "liberals proved to be conservative, with great peasant revolts taking place in the period before the famous Revolution" (TENGARRINHA, 2000, p. 202-206). All these movements culminated in the Regeneration period, starting in 1851, which was characterized by the alternation of the two political parties in power for 40 years and effectively carried out after a coup, elevating Saldanha to power supported by both liberals and conservatives, inflicting a definitive defeat on the supporters of Miguelista absolutism. *Pari Pasu* to these transformations, we also emphasize that the large development circulation of serials moved a great deal of periodicals and chronicle texts and variety ones as well that accounted for social life and expressed the role of the literate in society. Ernesto Rodrigues points out that "the first Portuguese newspaper to devote itself to the serials was the Serials of the Poor, from Porto (1838)". (RODRIGUES, 1998, p. 236).

Lisbon, like all cities, in the modernity of the 19th century, was seen by writers from two opposite sides: the virtuous city⁵ and the vice one, that is, in the clash between countryside versus city, which is thematized by many authors at that time, including Cesário Verde. The book *Gallant Lisbon*, by Fialho de Almeida, along its brief narratives, portrays a city in a dizzying transformation process, taking into account that "all of Fialho's work vibrates in a tension destined to push back the limits of unexpressed sensibility" (SARAIVA, LOPES, 1982, p. 961).

In the work *Gallant Lisbon*, the author brings together chronicles about the city, focusing on its two aspects: the old and the new. The chronicle as a genre, according to Antonio Candido's assumptions in his text, is the "life on the very ground floor", and deals with the circumstantial, captures the fleeting city movements in a conversational tone with the reader.

As stated by Antônio Cândido:

Its purpose is not that of writers who think of 'staying', that is, remaining in the memory and admiration of posterity; and its perspective is not that of those who write from the top of the mountain, but from the simple ground floor. For this reason, it manages almost without wanting to transform literature into something intimate in relation to each one's life, and when it moves from the newspaper to the book, we find ourselves somehow amazed for its durability can be greater than it herself thought of (CÂNDIDO, 1984, p.06).

In this part of the introduction, written for the genre collection - *To enjoy reading*, we ascertain that the author enhances the chronicle not only as popular style, but also as an intimate reading for the lector, in which he will identify and recognize himself, within his daily life, because, often, the event, the narrated and/or described fact is there, right in front of one's face.

Julio Ramos, when dealing with modernity in Latin America, distinguishes that the participation of the intellectual in late-century newspapers, whether literary or not, constituted the exercise of writing the nation and

⁵ There is a book by Fialho de Almeida, entitled - *The vice city*, published in 1882, in which most of his stories are set in rustic environments.

corresponded in peripheral countries to the need of “giving shape to the modernizing dream and overcome the old regimes”. (RAMOS, 2008, p.27).

In “Old Lisbon and New Lisbon”, the first narrative of the aforementioned book by Fialho de Almeida, the author himself presents a morbid and decrepit view of the old city, abusing the personifications of each urban object, which sharpens even more the sense of a sickly and pessimistic place. We perceive a dying city description, whose big news was the first drug store installation, a slight hope sign of social cure, embedded in the aspects of buildings, streets and people.

His narrative contemplates a medieval Lisbon, without any attraction for the present or future generations, whose characters belong to the dregs of society, composing a disgusting and unhappy picture. In his explanation, he emphasizes something picturesque and poetic in that city, such as the swans, which populated the streets and the beautiful landscape, seen from aboard the dismal urban transport, still powered by horses.

The author takes a brief break from his criticism of the old city and, in an interruption, when he returns to Lisbon, after a period in which he lived in the Orient, he finds a city renewed by the influence of young students with a visibly Parisian inspiration.

It is also important to accent that, in the sixties of the 19th century, Coimbra students were aware of new directions in the main cultural centers of Europe, diverging from the writers’ romanticism from the so-called Lisbon School. One of the causes of this transformation process was the inauguration of Beira Alta railway, linking Coimbra to Paris, facilitating contact and access to books and new trends in French literature. This change was further intensified with the Coimbra Question, in 1865, when these young men became even more attentive to new trends, which came from France, England and Germany, and the lectures, known as Casino Lisbonense Conferences, six years later.

According to Antônio José Saraiva:

The group of intellectuals who rose to public life at this important moment was called the <<70th generation>>. Many of this group members were formed in Coimbra, at a time when the academic generation had the opportunity to get in touch with the most recent literary, scientific and philosophical currents, poorly known in Portugal – contact facilitated by the circumstance that in 1864 Coimbra remained connected by railroad to Paris (SARAIVA, 1965, p. 149).

Although he did not participate directly in these movements, considering that during this period, Fialho de Almeida was beginning his studies at the European College, it had a strong influence, in his prose, on the realist/naturalist literature, especially with regard to the big city with its ailments and vices.

The new Lisbon continues with its critical content, less acidic, however, still with a careful look and a detailed description of the social and architectural transformations of Lisbon life, maintaining its discourse of an observer who analyzes, in detail, the most diverse society sectors, as we can perceive in this excerpt:

From 34 until now, education, although slow and sloppy, has given our men progressive intellectual refinements, which have made him a skeptic in politics, a believer in science, an atheist in religion, a bandit in love, and in art a *deletanti*⁶ (ALMEIDA, 1920, p. 18).

It is worth mentioning that the Portuguese Civil War ended in 1834, by the London Treaty, with the Quadruple Alliance, which decided to intervene against the forces of D. Miguel, recognizing the Liberal Government that, despite the setbacks, brought about changes in the country, both in the social and educational scope, such as, for example, the fact that, in 1860, “the first schools were created in Portugal to train teachers” (SARAIVA, 1999, p. 291).

In his chronicle speech, the author, at the end of his narrative, exalts art, beauty, modernity, much more at the cost of English and French influences, which renewed that old city, emphasizing the cult of the modern man who seeks to intelligence, physical beauty and elegance, approaching a thought opposed to that medieval vision, until recently, ingrained in Lisbon.

III. THE CITY AND THE SOCIETY OF APPEARANCES IN “THE STREETS – THE SHOP WINDOW DEVIL – THE PINK ADULTERY”

In “The streets – the shop window devil – the pink adultery”, his heavy and critical tone grows as he describes disgustingly and in bad mood, life in the residential neighborhoods of Lisbon. It becomes evident his look of contempt for everything that is mundane, vile and grotesque and that is present around him. He usually starts his narrative with a sarcastic tone.

Let's observe this excerpt from the chronicle:

My residence is sad, for the street is glaucous and hazy, the horizon narrows, and the eccentric life that in these tall buildings, around me, is a continuous cursing, laughing and fighting. Day and night there are

⁶ Original transcript.

disputes and shirts drying through all these windows. In the stables, terrible bull-dogs butcher rats. Sewer voices on the first floor with tablets, they ask for half heebs? from those who pass by (ALMEIDA, 1920, p. 27).

As we can see, the narrator leads the reader to have the same perception regarding sensory elements, such as the smells, colors and sounds of that location, which, in his refined irony, he calls “sardonic epilepsy”. (ALMEIDA, 1920, p. 29).

From his sharp look we can notice a lost society, amidst vices, and the youth, which is driven to penury in these gambling places, when he says that boys “will fall there one day, suddenly, still with their parents’ mourning in the hat, and the bag full of inheritance” (ALMEIDA, 1920, p.31), being the narrator, an eyewitness of the first steps of moral decadence and the gutter of those individuals who live life without thinking about tomorrow. His fierce criticism addresses youthful naivete and the promiscuous end of an entire generation.

The night still has a prominent place for the author/observer of customs and behavior to be concerned with the issue of the girls’ prostitution still in their prime, the result of a family financial decay, as a means of survival, with no other direction take in order to change their lives.

It is also questioned the influence of the ruling classes by laying emphasis on women also consumed by vanity, in search of a life of appearances, in an attempt to compare themselves to high society ladies, raised, who “suffered the contagious influence of the dissipated life of the bosses” (ALMEIDA, 1920, p.33). In the name of this vanity, there is prostitution disguised as love relationships, leading women workers to sell sexual favors in exchange for appearing like society's ladies.

Finally, the narrator seeks a new focus for his narrative, until then, pessimistic and realistic, presenting to the reader, ironically, the adventures of a beautiful married lady who got involved in fancy adulteries, which turns out to be a type of a common practice in that society, to the point that husbands pretended not noticing their wives’ love escapades at nightfall. Irony, laughter and mockery make the cheating behavior a kind of poetic moment, in front of his window full of social scums.

IV. “AT NIGHT”: TWO CITIES, TWO SCHEDULES

The chronicle “At night”, in its own title, announces the nocturnal city. In his walk through the Lisbon night, the *flaneur*, the modern writer mask, a figure without identity whose address is the street and has his antecedents in Edgar Allan Poe's – *The man of the crowd*, in his detective tone, abandons himself to contemplation of the frantic London crowd, whose author Fialho de Almeida textually quotes Poe:

[...] but like Edgar Poe's man of crowds, others always walk around closed buildings, sniffing, retreating, following one, following another, in circuits of anguish, clinging to the last hope, and hunting always, *condotiérs* of vice, trying to appease their neurosis that disorients and exasperates them in the most hidden of their unhealthy affections (ALMEIDA, 1920, p.171-172).

Like Cesário Verde's *flaneur*, whose Poem – *The feeling of a westerner* focuses on the city from dusk to dawn, it begins with the part entitled *Ave-Marias*, a procedure that can be observed in Fialho's chronicle: “Five hours, six hours [...] the night falls, and the angelus disintegrates from the bells, through the air, like a voice of concord appeasing men tired of betraying themselves for a whole day” (ALMEIDA, 1920, p.161).

Again, the author uses personifications when narrating the nightfall in Lisbon city, describing the individuals who began to circulate during this time, the movement of stores and the public lighting at the streets. In his critique, he describes that working bourgeois society hides, in its appearance, one aspect of happiness, whose veil vanishes at nightfall, in a search for momentary pleasure, giving in to some vices tolerated by all, in a kind of moral failure, consented to everyone, when night falls, as we can see:

One by one, the gas lamps turn on their little red lights, in red funereal rows, which seem to create great prospects for burials in the streets. The boys proclaim newspapers and the cautious ones, caution: under the trees of the squares, along the marginal asphalts of the streets, dark anthills of people hesitate, come and go, their eyes glowing, their gestures tortured, as if disorientation had begun to stun them.
(...)

Viewed from the top of the hills, at that time, the city completely lost its bourgeois configuration in the sunlight, to become an indefinite necropolis with frightening perspectives, which comes from one side embedding itself in the curvature of the river, while by the others it drags and prolongs in succession of houses, lights, shadows and reflections, which give us the illusion of continuing without ending, until the end of the world (ALMEIDA, 1920, p. 163).

We heed that the city, in the author's view, undergoes a process of personification, takes on a life of its own, transforming itself into a body outlined by its contours and highlights, within the night, the grim silence that, during the day, is practically imperceptible:

In this scaly and phosphorous monster's body, which is Lisbon at night, made of plates, humps, legs, ankylosis, there is an arterial system designed by gas lights, through whose great vessels they carry movement and life; and a nervous system for the repercussion of their great miseries and great pains (ALMEIDA, 1920, p. 166).

The *flaneur* narrator scans the frayed city fabric, which wants to be modern, showing its reverse side, that is, the part forgotten by the modernity project – the city of folds and workers, who mingle with the dudes who frequent the night:

the figurines of the wayfarers clarify themselves - women in a hurry, whose heels bite the mud, in a tic of dolls and adulteresses, coal workers and dudes, caps and high hats - different types of people ruminating on different interests, hidden egoisms shrouding in external misanthropy, the brash of their insatiable ambitions (ALMEIDA, 1920, p.162).

The nightfall is accompanied by an uneasy feeling. When diving into the city's nocturnal abyss, Fialho de Almeida uses sound and light contours, which allow the reader to glimpse nebulous scenes, dark slopes, corridors, police actions against drunks and idlers; all these images appear simultaneously. From these sensory impressions, visual and auditory, we are able to observe that there is an immediate effect in the narrative reading. This presence of pictorial elements describes the urban night minutely, which are taken from reality, transforming the urban landscape from dark contours into a living grotesque organism, associated with chaos, with Dantesque hell:

It is the nocturnal “who” has taken over the city ever since, once the shops are closed, the streets darkened, the Americans and trains made rarer, to give way to his whims, monomanias, analysis and illness; because it is “he” who, in the honest boredom of the city, still feeds in his chest the macabre flame of the fantastic, which Edgar Poe is so pleased with in seeing it flicker, like a flower of civilization, rotten and funereal, on the surface of the great social declines. The police regard them suspiciously and attentively; the night guards don't let them ambush them in the shadow of the gates. They meet, get together, leave a corner, enter the opposite corner, pretend to leave, and then they appear again... And gnashing their teeth with cold, clasping their coats to the trunk, their eyes each deeper and deeper, their face more and more lurid, their step more and more unsteady, they circulate so much that they end up exhausted, from drunkenness, hunger, fatigue, illness and swaying, until the police distribute them to the chains, dumps them in hostels at night, or sends them as gifts to Mercifulness and hospitals (ALMEIDA, 1920, p.173).

Once again, we have the personification, no longer of physical objects, but of an entire city that only rests, after the messy midnight disorder, in a striking contrast with the respective dizzying city schedules: “This street effervescence soon dies. One after the other, the church bells gravely chime at zero hours: the sky is always black, cries cease, cars disappear” (ALMEIDA, 1920, p.173).

Suffocated by the satanic urban environment and immersed in boredom, the *flaneur* travels through the Lisbon night carrying a hopelessness note, in the face of the vices and perversities of the nocturnal characters, associating the city with a remarkable dismal necropolis where “every day the tomb loads with miserable at the ditch, and every day through the sixty gates of the city a multitude of wretched young people flock from all over the province” (ALMEIDA, 1920, p.173).

In this short story by Fialho de Almeida, the night comes alive in a forceful personification, enveloped with a dark and pessimistic aspect, in which vicious circles and sordidness predominate, with a mixture of the senses, all very well registered by a narrator-observer himself since he is a privileged eyewitness of this beautiful Dantesque spectacle.

V. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The modernization of urban areas is something necessary, considering that society must not remain stagnant, stuck in time. The evolution and progress of cities are important to keep up with society's demands. However, such advances bring certain problems to civic spaces and the majority of people in society suffer for the lack of these improvements which are not equally available to everyone.

In the three texts from *Gallant Lisbon*, we have one genuine look of this narrator-observer in relation to the surge of changes in the Portuguese capital and its consequences regarding the landscape and the new behavioral trends of its inhabitants.

Both in “Old Lisbon and New Lisbon”, as in “The streets – the shop window devil – the pink adultery” and “At night”, we have the opportunity to learn about the consequences and impacts, concerning the emergence of a new city, going through social and behavioral transformations, generating progress on one hand but also causing a gloomy and unhealthy urban space consequences as all sorts of cities which experienced their modernization process.

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