



AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF JUDITH TEIXEIRA'S LECTURE *DE MIM*

UMA TRADUÇÃO INGLESA DA CONFERÊNCIA *DE MIM*, DE JUDITH TEIXEIRA

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Abstract: After a brief introduction, I present the first English translation of a text by Judith Teixeira. Although the author describes *De Mim* as a *conferência*, i.e., a type of public lecture, the subtitle reveals her intention of “setting out” her “arguments concerning life, aesthetics and morality” in defence of her modernist poetics and futurist aesthetics, against the attacks of conservative commentators and critics. In pursuing these specific objectives, Teixeira felt obliged to provide a more systematic and broader critique of bourgeois culture and morality. This translation draws on the first edition of *De Mim* (TEIXEIRA, 1926), in which the author placed her very contemporary bibliographical references in footnotes (absent in later editions). Where necessary, I have added further notes either to identify the less well-known authorities on whom Teixeira draws in support of her arguments, or to clarify some of the more “bizarre” images she deploys in the text, especially in two of her own poems she quotes *in extenso* to exemplify her modernist poetics, and which have also been translated into English. Hopefully, the translation will allow students of modernism and literary censorship to broaden their understanding of the “Literature of Sodom” affair of 1923, in which poetry by Teixeira and António Botto, and a philosophical tract by Raul Leal, were seized and publicly burned. The translation may also encourage such scholars to expand the scope of their researches, and to explore new connections between already-familiar futurisms and the less well-known Portuguese variant.

Keywords. Judith Teixeira; modernism; futurism; the Literature of Sodom; censorship.

Resumo: Após uma breve introdução, será apresentado a primeira tradução inglesa de um texto publicado em 1926 por Judith Teixeira. Embora a autora de *De Mim* descreva a obra

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como uma “conferência”, ou seja, uma espécie de palestra pública, o subtítulo revela a sua intenção de “explicar” as suas “razões sobre à vida, sobre à estética, sobre à moral”, com vista a defender a sua poética modernista e, especificamente, a sua estética futurista, contra os ataques lançados pelas porta-vozes conservadoras da literatura. Ao fazê-lo, Teixeira sente-se obrigada a sistematizar a sua própria crítica da cultura e da moralidade burguesas. A tradução baseia-se na primeira edição de *De Mim* (TEIXEIRA, 1926), em que constam em notas de rodapé as suas muito atuais referências bibliográficas (ausentes em edições posteriores). Sempre que necessário foram acrescentadas notas adicionais, quer para identificar as autoridades às quais a autora recorre para fundamentar os seus argumentos, quer para esclarecer algumas das imagens “bizarras” que aparecem no texto, sobretudo nos dois poemas da sua autoria que ela cita in extenso (também aqui traduzidos) para exemplificar a sua poética modernista. Espera-se que esta tradução permitirá aos investigadores a ampliação da sua compreensão do caso “Literatura de Sodoma” de 1923, suscitará mais estudos comparativos sobre o modernismo e a censura literária, e eventualmente identifique novas ligações entre os futurismos já familiares e a variante portuguesa menos conhecida.

Palavras-chave. Judith Teixeira; modernismo; futurismo; Literatura de Sodoma; censura.

1. INTRODUCTION:

The reason for including a translation in a dossier dedicated to the work of Judith Teixeira may not be immediately obvious. However, providing readers, be they lusophone or not, with an English translation of her important polemical text *De Mim* [About Me], serves several purposes. For those interested in literary modernism but who have only a rudimentary command of Portuguese, the translation will help clarify some of the literary, philosophical and political underpinnings of Judith Teixeira’s aesthetics, and thereby facilitate comparisons with similar writings from elsewhere. For those with greater competence in Portuguese, it may offer an interesting exercise for those studying either modernism or, indeed, translation. Finally, for those with Portuguese as their mother tongue, a good command of English, and



the original *De Mim* to hand, my version offers an opportunity to look over the shoulder of a translator at work, and may even provide a little amusement if any infelicities remain.²

Judith Teixeira, whom VIANA (1977, p. 201) described as “Portuguese modernism’s only woman poet”, finished writing *De Mim* sometime in the first half of 1926 and published it in August of that year (JORGE & GASPAR, 1996, p.62). The text can be most accurately described as a combination of literary apologia (GERRY, 2023)³ and aesthetic manifesto (ALONSO 2015, p. 27; SILVA 2015, p. 268). By publishing a text on her personal aesthetics and poetics with a view to delivering it at some public event, Judith Teixeira’s main aims seem to have been: (a) to defend the emerging futurist aesthetics that underpinned her first two collections of poems; (b) to answer the insults and calumnies to which she had been subjected over the preceding three years; and (c) to mount her own attack on the moral posturing, shallowness and hypocrisy of mainstream intellectuals, artists and critics.

In 1923, in what became known as the *Literatura de Sodoma* affair, works by António Botto, Raul Leal and Judith Teixeira were denounced as immoral by conservative students, seized and impounded by order of the Governor of Lisbon, and burned. Botto’s book *Canções* [Songs] attracted some adverse press attention when first published in 1921, more as a result of the photograph of the author – bare-chested, gazing downwards through half-closed eyes – than of the quality or tenor of his poetry (BARRETO 2012, p. 241-242). When Olisipo, Pessoa’s own publishing house, issued a second edition of *Canções* in 1922, Leal’s *Sodoma Divinisada* following soon after, public hostility grew, fuelled by the publication of Judith Teixeira’s *Decadência*, and by inflammatory articles in the Catholic newspaper *A Época*.⁴

2. In my translation, I chose to group together many of Teixeira’s one-sentence paragraphs into slightly longer ones, and to limit the use of the initial capital letter to just a few of her key concepts – Truth, Beauty, Art/Artist, the Idea (i.e., the shedding of all bourgeois inhibitions), the *Machine of Life*, and the *Majority* (the latter being the principal descriptor Teixeira uses for all but the chosen few among the intelligentsia). Very occasionally, I have completed or clarified a phrase by adding my own words in square brackets.

3. In Ancient Greece, a speech made in someone’s defence was referred to as apologia. Today, the term is used mainly in a derogatory sense, signifying a document (paratext, review, article or longer work) aimed at conferring undeserved praise or bogus legitimacy on controversial ideas. Theological apologies were often written and presented retrospectively by authors who are suspected, denounced or even formally accused of harbouring heretical views, whereas literary apologies have tended to be pre-emptive, precautionary texts written as prefaces to a work that the author, publisher or, indeed, translator believed might attract public or official reproof or censure.

4. One article in particular complained of a student party at which rowdy carnival revellers allegedly wore drag. The journalist disingenuously ‘forgot’ that a high point of every Lisbon students’ official Carnival Week was the King of Carnival’s wedding, in which it was the custom for the “bride”, Princess Snow-Flower, and her “maids of honour” – all of them men dressed as women – to disembark at the Paço de Terreiro and process through the streets of central Lisbon before attending the wedding celebrations and a student ball (https://hemerotecadigital.cm-lisboa.pt/OBRAS/IlustracaoPort/1923/N886/N886_item1/P17.html).



Pessoa published an oblique defence of Botto’s work and lifestyle in the pages of the *Contemporânea*, arguing that homosexuality was an unimportant detail in the persona of Portugal’s only authentic aesthete (PESSOA, 1922). In the following number of *Contemporânea* (No. 4, p.31-35), the Catholic journalist Álvaro Maia denounced Pessoa’s argument as sophistry, prompting an extensive response from Raul Leal⁵, whom Pessoa had defended as a paragon among Portuguese philosophers, and in no way than the psychotic pederast students had accused him of being (PESSOA, 2012, p. 270). Seeking to distance himself from the “polemical poetess” (ALONSO, 2015, p. 25), Pessoa dismissed Judith Teixeira as a minor figure in the scandal, deserving of “no place (...) among the major protagonists of the affair” (PESSOA, 1996, p. 61). Rather than a chivalrous gesture to deflect public attention from her, Pessoa’s comments seem designed to denigrate the work of a fellow modernist who also happened to be a lesbian. Seemingly threatened, both as a modernist and a male, he churlishly failed to speak in her defence.

Pessoa shared the then-prevalent view that a woman’s role was to be decorative (actively, in order to secure a husband, passively as his trophy) and procreative (to endlessly reproduce the same social order, literally as well as metaphorically). Clearly, he felt a certain disquietude over women with the talent and ambition to earn their own living, considering them “inverts” of one sort or another. He used this term to describe any woman who challenged conventional gender boundaries by seeking entry into professions in which men had always enjoyed a monopoly, and famously affirmed that prostitution was the only economic pursuit that did not “spoil” a woman (PESSOA, 1990, p. 425). He applied the term “invert” specifically to lesbians, whom he seemed to consider part of a wider conspiracy to erode male tutelage and companionship.

On Teixeira’s part, there was no immediate response, neither to her critics nor to those whom she felt should have supported her. She preferred to complete a second collection of poems, *Castelo de Sombras* [Castle of Shadows] and, with the support of modernist luminaries – many of whom were, at the time, as preeminent as Pessoa⁶ – launch the influential albeit ephemeral magazine *Europa*. Three years after the *Literatura de Sodoma*

5. This took the form of the (in)famous *Sodoma Divinisada*, issued by Pessoa’s Olisipo publishing house in February of 1923.

6. Contributors to *Europa*’s three editions included the poets Américo Durão and Florbela Espanca, the novelist Aquilino Ribeiro, the architect and graphic designer José Pacheco, the magazine editor Carolina Homem Christo, the painter illustrator and Jorge Barradas, and the journalist Reinaldo Ferreira, otherwise known as ‘Reporter X’, a specialist in what today might be called ‘fake news’.



affair, when she came to publish *De Mim*, Teixeira defended herself and futurism in a manner many would have found more lucid and truer to the spirit of Portuguese modernism than the convoluted and disingenuous argument Pessoa had devised in defence of his two allies.

Judith Teixeira's published works only appeared in a single critical edition in 1996 (JORGE & GASPAR, 1996), but scholars rapidly began to recognise not only the quality of her writing and the importance of her contribution to Portuguese modernism, but also the insights that could be gained into gendered and homoerotic literatures through a close and/or comparative reading of her work. In 1997, another work of Teixeira's came to light when, in an antiquarian bookshop in Lisbon, Cláudia Pazos Alonso discovered a notebook containing manuscript poems by Teixeira – some published, others hitherto unknown – and two typewritten versions of a second aesthetic manifesto entitled *Da Saudade* [On Nostalgia⁷]. In the text, she denounces *saudosismo*, the early 20th century movement associated most closely with the name of Teixeira de Pascoaes,⁸ as “the nostalgia of doleful defeated souls that corrodes and paralyses” both mind and body, preventing Portuguese society from renewing itself (TEIXEIRA, 2015, p. 259).

Subsequent detailed studies have enriched our understanding of Teixeira's writing, with scholarly interest widening and deepening, not only in Portugal but also in Brazil, such that the volume of research on her prose – both fiction and non-fiction – is now beginning to catch up with the assessments of her poetry. Predictably, most of these critical studies are in Portuguese but, hopefully, the soon-to-be published critical English-language edition of Teixeira's prose (SILVA & GERRY, 2023) will encourage specialists in futurism to include the lesser-known Portuguese variant in their comparative studies, as well as providing them with fresh examples of possible intersections between atavism, modernism, futurism and feminism in early 20th century fiction in Europe and the Americas.

2. THE TRANSLATION.

7. Admittedly, “nostalgia” hardly does justice to the word *saudade*, often deemed untranslatable. Perhaps the nearest equivalents in European languages are *hiraeth*, *dor*, and *morriña* (Welsh, Romanian and Galician, respectively). *Saudade* is habitually used in the Portuguese-speaking world to convey someone or something being *missed* – a loved one, one's home or native land or some past state of affairs temporarily lost, permanently irrecoverable or, indeed, accepted as being unattainable. It can be best thought of as a feeling of wistful nostalgia, sorrowful yearning or painful remembrance, experienced in the present but summoning up the past, and occasionally reflecting an almost utopian yearning for a chimerical future state, personal or collective, yet to come about and perhaps never to be achieved.

8. These discoveries were included in *Judith Teixeira: Poesia e Prosa*, edited by ALONSO & SILVA (2015) a collection also containing new critical essays (ALONSO 2015; SILVA, 2015) on the author and her writings.



JUDITH TEIXEIRA

DE MIM

CONFERÊNCIA

EM QUE SE EXPLICAM AS MINHAS RASÕES

S
OBRE A VIDA
OBRE A ESTÉTICA
OBRE A MORAL

LISBOA

1926



JUDITH TEIXEIRA

ABOUT ME

**A lecture in which I set out my Arguments concerning
Life, Aesthetics and Morality
Lisbon: Editora Livraria Rodrigues, 1926.**

*A scandal consists of neither a person nor an act,
but rather the noise made by scandalised people*
HENRY-MARX

Ladies and gentlemen:

It is vanity on my part, and an irritation for you, perhaps, that I come here to talk to you of myself, of my inner life. Nonetheless, ever since my book of poems *Decadência* was confiscated some years past, and following the violent criticism of my *Castelo de Sombras* collection and, likewise, of my most recent poems *Núa* – that fiery magnolia blossom, strange and exotic, in which I invested all the candour of my consciousness as a woman and as an Artist, and all the Truth of my avid feelings regarding Beauty – I have felt an enormous and all-consuming desire to share with Intellectuals of my own times the ageless emotional arguments that live in my soul, and in the souls of all who regard artistic creativity as the noblest of reasons to live!

And as for my poems ... what extraordinary comments, all that noisy rabble-rousing hullabaloo, and all that hot air about their serene and sculptural rhythmic form! And when voices were raised even further, when the perfidious hands of those “innocents” among the intelligentsia began fanning the bonfire’s flames, and when blows struck home even through the heavy arras of my spiritual refuge, it filled me with happiness. I smiled! Finally, my hour had come, the hour of my triumph, that golden vibrant hour of which generals – in the tragic clamour of battle, mad with anguish and despair – can only dream.

I’ll say it again – I smiled. My artist’s ambitions had been fulfilled. I understood only too well that my poetic works were not soap bubbles for the intrusive eyes of men. In their poetical and musical structure, and even in the vaguer and more diaphanous forms in which I had left my dreams to slumber, there was, after all, some substance that pulsed, was alive, and consequently perturbed people’s souls. And if it perturbed them, it was because there *was*



“something” in that substance. And the creation of that “something” is the magnificent core of art’s mission.

So, before your combined intelligences, I’d like to confess that the lust⁹ with which some of my poems pulsate, constitutes, above all, the most sumptuous and graceful form that I could give to certain of my attitudes that were more driven by Art than by a moral code that society constantly commends to others by contravening it.

Hour by hour, I have passionately lived this ideal and lust has been the precise form that my sincerity has taken. And in what way did this sincerity – a virtue attained by so few – harm the everyday honesty of others? For Heaven’s sake, that’s precisely why the others don’t profess their sincerity, fearing it as much as they fear breaking society’s moral code or incurring the punishment of Holy Mother Church. And we show ourselves to be all the more ignoble when it is in questions of conscience that we fear sincerity most of all. Those who reduce life – from the most intimate of personal acts to quibbling over a debt to our local grocer – to a system of dissimulation and lies, it is the public, it is contact with the public, that fills them with unbearable panic. It seems to those good souls that the public can see in their very eyes the poor stuff of which their lives are made.

And it was my exacting formulation of the moral processes that rule our existence, and my singular commitment to upholding them, that provoked the disagreement between me and the *Majority*. Obviously, in the popular mind, I was denounced as immoral and dissolute!... And it was by using my concept of Beauty that I – in whose consciousness resides both an enlightened religious credo and a clear understanding of morality – proclaimed the greater part of the lust that all true Artists invest in their most potent ideas and which, thus exalted, are liberated forever from the prejudices of our present epoch or society.

And God – who commands the course of my acts no less than any other who embraces religion – by consenting to others casting stones, forces us to take refuge on ground higher

9. For Dante, lust was love in “disorder” and, in Catholic theology, this was interpreted as the enjoyment of carnal relations for their own sake, rather than for the procreative function for which they were designed. Thus lust came to mean an immoderate and misdirected penchant for sexual pleasure. In Valentine de Saint-Point’s heterodox view, since both flesh and spirit are creative, lust can be a vital force in human progress. Lust could reverse the trend that had drawn women too close to the feminine pole of the masculinity-femininity continuum. Lust could produce more of the assertive, “virile” warrior-women (*sur-femmes*) who could then exert more influence over humanity’s future. Lust as a vital force also underpinned her more strategic aim of gaining women – who, in the Italian futurist movement, were numerous – their “rightful” role alongside men.



than the artless chirping sparrows can reach – even though here, on this plane of exceptionality, we risk falling victim to the cruel and shameless gluttony of a condor!¹⁰

And then one day, the voice of Valentine de Saint-Point loudly rang out, boldly proclaiming with delicious candour: “Lust is a force!”¹¹ And, as a poet, I would simply say: Lust is a source, full of pain and full of blessings, from whose violent bosom flows, with song and suffering, the harmonious rhythm of our sensations! Lust is indeed a force. It lives in us all, dictating every one of our acts! It is unconscious, and therefore it is vileness among those not conscious of its presence; but for the illuminated – those who take responsibility for their lust – it is a sacred organising force and guiding principle.

My open and honest way of living repudiates all weakness, all semblance of indecision or reticence, all contrived timidity of countenance! I know not how to write of fainthearted loves! I adore the sun, I love colour, the flame is dear to me, I bless strength, blood exalts me, violence intoxicates me, struggle elates me, and I dream of the unruly roar of the sea! Pale colours don’t interest me. The immaculate colour of lilies, white and mournful, leaves me unmoved: they suffer not, nor do they pulsate and they utter no verses of martyrdom or lust! My sorrow is magenta, my bitterness as black as ebony, and my happiness, festooned in poppies, is further reddened by the sun’s rays before it bursts into song.

* * * * *

Ladies and gentlemen, it has long been my dream that Art might elevate me to a plane of exceptionality from where I could see the genesis of some of the bizarre images I have fashioned in my poems – something on which I would now like to make a few swift

10. For Teixeira, the threat posed by the condor symbolises the danger of being consumed by lust, rather than using lust as a means of widening experience and elevating sensibilities. Though the metaphor succeeds in warning against lust for lust’s sake, Teixeira’s attempt at exoticism is based on a false premise: condors are not birds of prey: they feed on carrion. They are nonetheless exceptional both in the Western imaginary, due to their size and majesty, and in Andean cosmology, embodying the prime virtues of goodness, justice, leadership and wisdom. They act as intermediaries between humans and the gods, and guide the dead as they journey to the spirit world.

11. It is worth quoting the opening lines of de Saint-Point’s manifesto in full: “Lust, stripped of any moral preconceptions and seen as an essential element of life’s dynamism, is a force! For a race with strength, lust – like pride – is a virtue that motivates, a hearth where energies are rekindled. Lust is the expression of a being that is projected beyond itself. It is the painful joy of fulfilled flesh, the joyful pain of birth. Whatever secret draws us together, lust is a union of the flesh. It is the sensory and sensual synthesis that produces the greatest liberation of a being’s spirit. It is one part of humanity communicating with the entire sensuality of the earth; it is the Panic shudder of one part of the earth. Lust is flesh in search of the unknown, just as thought is spirit in search of the unknown.” (SAINT-POINT, 2005, p. 17-18, my translation).



comments. Those images could prick my imagination at any hour, prick it as if fiery bees¹² were buzzing before my dazzled eyes! And so, in my poems, I spoke candidly of the exceptional nature of these new motifs of Beauty that were agitating my feelings! By doing so, I set fire to that old scarecrow that the feeble call “convention” and I went beyond what the strong call “the pale”. And, by the light of this strange bonfire, I raised my new motifs of Beauty aloft, unveiling them to my impatient spirit with hymns of grace, love and victory! In reply, the philistines first stretched out their arms, then froze in bewilderment and, with that, an abyss opened between me and the *Majority* ...

Today, however, new desires burn within me: I want more sun, more colour, more expressivity! My practiced hands will clear the way to where new sources of Beauty may be discovered! Lift up your voices, repeat my hosannas to the healthy, powerful Truth that gives birth to all those notions of Beauty from which I fashion my Art! And, whenever my verses sing of my sorrow or my joy, all the noblest aspects of my life pulsate together, as I try to make the rhythm of my words as expressive as possible.

Sorrow in all its forms has Beauty; joy, too, is beautiful as well as being healthy. But make no mistake, it is Artists who give sorrow and joy the greatest Beauty, as they carve suffering – in forms unimagined until then – from the rough cold block of reality, forging new models of triumph, lasciviousness and heroism! And it is in this way that, in Art, changes are made to the Truth of life. Since Art must live in conscious connection to this life, as a result, the Artist’s sensibility sometimes finds itself in conflict with the life that everyone lives. The *hide-bound*, the entrenched, those who don’t budge an inch, who won’t progress, they just don’t understand us. They can comprehend neither our souls’ flight nor the mutations that Truth undergoes, and they persecute us because, deep down, they are themselves persecuted by the petty guilt their own acts engender. And “common sense” – that Sancho Panza of morality invented by the bourgeoisie to watch over its “sound principles” – is filled with fear.

And if we choose to show them our fantastical version of something real, all they are able to see are its roughness and crudity. Fantasy is the essence, the sacred perfume that wafts from the souls of Artists, enveloping some of the coarser aspects of nature and life. Fantasy is, so to speak, the keynote of the central emotional chord of our sensibility; it rises with a sharp and penetrating timbre, resonating through all our senses. It is this refinement that separates

12. The term used by Teixeira is *abelha-de-fogo*. The South American “fire-bee” (*oxytrigona tataira*), though it carries no sting, has the capacity to squirt attackers with formic acid – hence the insect’s local names, ranging from “abelha bota-fogo”, recalling both the word for arsonist and for the fuse used in the firing of cannons on fighting ships, to the more prosaic but equally expressive terms such as the “piss-fire” and “shit-fire” bee.



and distinguishes us from the bourgeois, from the compliant, just as the limpid sound of crystal is distinct from the everyday clinking of glass.

Artists don't ascend towards the Truth of things; they use their refined sensibilities to draw Truth out of what is around them and, in so doing, often alter the form that Truth takes. In this way, a certain roughness is smoothed away by the Artist's subtle perceptions, always with illuminating effect. The *diminished*, the *petty*, the *limited*, they shrink in fear and accuse us of being "unbalanced". This designation doesn't offend us. Our minds cannot achieve the imperturbable and impassive equilibrium of minds like theirs that operate in one direction only. In contrast, we need to remain fatally *unbalanced*, and our twofold natures must become capable of disturbing even our own senses. We must feel, pulsate, suffer and want on a scale of refinement wholly beyond their experience.

Due to the manner in which our sensibilities are tuned, we find ourselves in a world of exception; there, our sense of Beauty transforms air, light, colour, our notions of space and the form that things assume in space. Is this not so? Of course, it is! Often, we alter Truth, but only in order to give the maximum truthfulness to our fantasies. The Artist's conception should have no limits. Rather, it should enjoy maximum freedom! Sometimes, by fleeing reality we are able to create unprecedented Beauty; by clarifying what Truth is and depicting it well, we sometimes ascend to the very finest nuances of colour! Narrow and conventional standards would turn my mind sickly and neurasthenic.¹³ My emotions, born of some mysterious sensibility, refuse to conform to traditional norms or concepts. I live my emotions, I feel them, and I translate them using the greatest measure of elegance that my art can muster.

My verses belong to no school. They're mine! I always obey the impression of the moment, colouring my words, embellishing or tempering the most vivid hues of each image, so as to find the precise words that will meet my artistic and spiritual criteria. And I'm thankful that my verses attract disapproval. They do so because whenever voluptuousness and Beauty set my spirit atremble, it soars to heights unattainable by others, by the *hide-bound*.

13. Neurasthenia was a catch-all term once employed to refer to the lethargy, depression and poor concentration suffered mainly by women. It is likely the symptoms were caused by the tick-borne infection we know today as Lyme disease, whose prevalence grew as deforestation induced by industrialisation increased human contact with animal species that carried parasites of the *Borrelia* genus. Though popular fiction adopted the term as a pseudo-scientifically validated form of 'soft' misogyny, here Judith Teixeira subverts its meaning by using it to denote an atrophy of women's creativity induced by their compliance to bourgeois conventions.



Francisco Lagreca¹⁴ has the following to say:

Futurist Art, with its unique and strange way of describing things, and of translating in a most original manner the sensations that come to us from the outside world, is ennobled by those souls who, rather than enjoying the ‘privilege’ of experiencing only approved sensations, remain open to every unpredictability and mutability that contemporary life may afford (LAGRECA, 1923).¹⁵

He’s absolutely right. He also says that “in questions of Art, the soul teaches itself to feel with greater or lesser intensity”. I would only add that, in my case, it is my soul that teaches me how to speak of my sensations. Nothing surprises Artists. What stuns ‘well-balanced’ people, only causes Artists to ponder. An Artist’s perceptions should always be at odds with the way the *Majority* feels: the vision of the *Majority* has a permanently limited focus, while our eyes have lenses that can penetrate more deeply. That is why I saw, in the gleaming coral red of cactus flowers, the Bacchanalian orgies of old, and why, in *Decadência*, I portrayed them as I did:

Cactus flowers¹⁶

Cactus flowers, your skin so blameless,
mirror-bright incarnations
Scarlet cachinnations
of concubines...
Rendered tipsy by the sun,
on golden mornings you shine,
luxuriant and shameless!

A fine bloom and so impudent!
The light of the sun more brilliant
in the vermilion of your petals...
Suggesting perhaps
an air of insolence,
even petulance,
as you grant a grudging bite

14. The Brazilian poet, essayist and journalist Francisco de Castro Lagreca (1883-1944) was born of Italian parentage in São Paulo’s rural hinterlands. As a journalist, he wrote for many of the major newspapers and literary magazines. As a writer, he was a member of Olavo Bilac’s bohemian circle and became closely associated with Brazilian pantheism and modernism; in 1922, his short story collection *Cidade do amor* received an honourable mention from the *Academia Brasileira de Letras*. As an art critic, he published *Apologia da arte moderna* (1923), an influential study of new trends in Brazilian art.

15. Here Teixeira provides a reference to Lagreca: “*A apologia da arte moderna* (1923), pag. 74”.

16. The two poems “Cactus flowers” and “Illusion”, and the role they play in *De Mim*, are discussed in detail in GERRY (forthcoming, 2023). I am grateful to Cláudia Pazos Alonso, Maria Lúcia Dal Farra and Samantha Pious for their comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of the two poems.



to each golden bee that settles!

Born to feel the sun's every kiss
and even when possessed
by its searing torrid rays ...
You're wanton,
destined just for this —
to enjoy love's mysteries in every way!

I like a flower that's pagan
and sensual,
that in some mystic ritual,
yields, unabashed, its charms so fully
to the sun's amber embrace!

In your ruby blush, O cactus flower,
lies your life's blood, your vitality and power...
And I, like you, have such a great thirst for life!

Francisco Lagreca goes on to say:

The soul has sensibilities all of its own, intimate ones that, in today's dizzying collective existence with all its unforeseeable and dazzling nuances, are manifested in all their subtle eccentricity in the emotions they stir in artists' souls, as they apply their objectivity to all the trivia that evoke in this pagan aesthetic elite such fascination, sensuality and ecstasy. When I describe the contours of a Gip design,¹⁷ when I caress their surfaces and sense that *the body beneath the silk is naked*, it is the mysterious sensibility of my soul that is at work, and I experience the sensation of nudity just as if I had been stroking the velvety surface of real flesh through real fabric. When I write that the depths of the night are charcoal-smudged, it is my soul that sketches the very ether and dusts it with black powder. These are subtle, magnetised sensations that can only be comprehended only by those with a modern artist's soul (LAGRECA, 1923, emphasis in the original).¹⁸

That is what Lagreca tells us, and I myself would only add the following: if, in the unquiet mind of true Artists, their peculiar sensibilities render the ordinary aspect of things bizarre and transmuted, then in order to conform to their conception of Beauty, those very things must be portrayed with the utmost truthfulness. Let me give you another example, this time from a collection of my poems called *Núa*:

17. "GIP" was the maker's mark used by Georges Pierre, a prominent French Art Nouveau designer.

18. Here Teixeira repeats her reference to Lagreca: "*A apologia da arte moderna* (1923). pag. 43".



Illusion

You come at each day's dawning
to embed yourself in my dreams
— Byzantine statue
hewn from a snowdrift!
A weightless hand you
tenderly lift
Towards my eyelids so bruised by mourning ...

You come quite naked, a bright halo of light
silhouetting your graceful lines!
Your arrival like
the sun as it shows its first signs
at dawn!...
And my body trembles,
and my soul sings,
like a nightingale in whom love is reborn!

Over the naked girliness of your body
two swans, heads rearing up,
pause in blank amazement at what it is they're feeling
while in the purple silks
of my alcove bed,
in ruby scintillations
from their plump buds are born
the vermilion orchid flowers,
of my own sensations!...

You are beautiful like this; quite naked,
paying your sweet dues
as you offer me,
unmistakably, the gift of your body
and insistently demand
I possess you...!

I want to cling to the shining illusion
of your so gracious form ...
And for each and every perfumed caress
— water lilies stripped bare, undressed
by the overwhelming force of the storm
my convulsions have raised
— to pour balm upon my shattered nerves
lying in pieces, seeking rest.

.....

Awake now, I see your far-off arms,
stretching upwards



as you disentangle
 one last tousled golden tress
 of sun
 that playfully, across my alcove's
 drowsing bounty, you'll strew...

O blessèd vision! And each and every time so new!

A blonde Salomé
 dancing your sculptural measure!
 Your nakedness
 this morn is more complete!
 Come hide yourself in the deepest shadows of my eyes
 and pray never more leave me...
 Never again, not ever!

Clearly, therefore, we may conclude that the sensuality Artists give to their emotional motifs has its origin and is experienced only in their minds, and is filtered exclusively by their artistic sensibilities. Obviously, I don't intend to beg anyone's pardon for my work. God forbid! Nor will I justify or explain the concepts I have used, as some of the most celebrated¹⁹ – whose reputation rests upon their wisdom and their talent – have done. Let's just see what Pierre Louÿs²⁰ has to say:

Those who have not experienced the demands of the flesh to the very limit, whether in devotion to them or in repudiation of them, are – for that very reason – incapable of fully understanding the demands of the spirit. Just as the beauty of the soul illuminates a whole face, it is virile action²¹ that renders the mind more fertile (LOUÏS, 1896, p. x).²²

19. Here, Teixeira is using the word *consegredos* to refer to what today we would call canonical authors.

20. Pierre Louÿs (1870 – 1925) was a Belgian writer who aimed to blend pagan sensuality with stylistic perfection in his erotic evocations of the Ancient World. He was the dedicatee of Oscar Wilde's play *Salomé* in its original French version, both von Sternberg (*The devil is woman*) and Buñuel (*That obscure object of desire*) directed film adaptations of his short story "La femme et le pantin" [The woman and the puppet], and his poetry was set to music by Debussy and Sorabji. Teixeira's quote, from Louÿs's preface to his 1896 novel *Aphrodite: Mœurs antiques* [Aphrodite: Manners of the ancient world], follows the original closely, but she omits the important clarifying and contextualising affirmation that precedes it: "[L]a sensualité est la condition mystérieuse, mais nécessaire et créatrice, du développement intellectuel." [Sensuality is the mysterious but necessary and creative condition of intellectual development" (my translation).

21. Louÿs seems to be using the word "virile" not to reflect some sort of absolute masculinity but in its Saint-Pointian sense, i.e., to refer to that half of the masculinity-femininity continuum where male traits are marginally, moderately or maximally represented.

22. Here Teixeira provides the reference: "Pierre Louÿs, Prefacio da *Aphrodite*".



Marie Bashkirtseff²³, that child prodigy who came from Russia to fill Paris with her matchless yearning to be beautiful, has left us a concept that is both intelligent and profound: “Physical luxury is necessary for moral luxury”.²⁴ [Put another way] things have value in accordance with the world of Beauty they call into being around them.

At the end of the artistic process of writing those red incendiary poems – in which I carved Beauty into figures posed so bizarrely that they dazzled even my own senses – if I had wanted to find the real source of my creations, I would have been obliged to descend to my own inner world and interrogate my ‘unconscious self’. At such moments, in the particular state of Beauty I find myself experiencing, certain psychological motifs from my inner world unconsciously stir themselves inside my conscious rational mind.

The bourgeoisie, panicked by the inferno that my fantasies created, comes from far and wide to stone me, without a shred of conscience – for only those who are *cultured* and *enlightened* can possess such a thing as conscience. So be it, let them continue, because I, with my irreverent and incurable stubbornness, will also continue – with sincerity and honesty – to tell them of my concept of Art with the greatest truthfulness I can muster!

Art should never let itself be entirely subordinated to Nature’s rough truths; on the contrary, it is Nature that should subordinate itself to the images of it that Art creates. Oscar Wilde has already said as much.²⁵ What is certain is that Nature alone is not enough to fulfil the Artist’s ambitions. To do so requires us to go beyond what the eye can see.

23. Marie Bashkirtseff (1858-1884) was a painter, sculptor and diarist, born near Karkhiv (Ukraine), then part of the Russian Empire. The words Teixeira quotes in French – “le luxe physique est nécessaire au luxe moral” [physical luxury is necessary for moral luxury] – are to be found not in her better-known *Journal* (1890), but in the first volume of her *Cahiers intimes inédits*, published only in 1925. Given the purpose of *De Mim* and the development of Teixeira’s argument, the most plausible explanation is that she misremembered Bashkirtseff’s phrase, confusing “luxe” [luxury] and “luxure” [lust]. If she mistakenly believed Bashkirtseff had written that the experiencing of physical lust is necessary for the growth of moral behaviour considered immoderate, it made sense to use these words to reinforce the conclusion Louÿs has drawn. Moreover, while Bashkirtseff frequently speaks of luxury in her journals and notebooks, she never mentions lust, nor records the truly intimate details of her life.

24. Here Teixeira provides a reference to Bashkirtseff’s “*Cahiers intimes inédits*, pag. 7”, published in 1925.

25. It seems likely that Teixeira is thinking of Wilde’s essay *The Decay of Lying*, a deeply ironic text at the beginning of which Vivian states the contra-intuitive case for Art being the creative force behind Nature rather than *vice versa*. Wilde’s character also affirms that few people, when they look at something, actually *see*, which is one of the criteria Teixeira uses to distinguish the true artist from the rest, and the elect from the herd. Turning the “Sancho Panza of common sense” on its head, Vivian’s argument is as follows: “For what is Nature? Nature is no great mother who has borne us. She is our creation. It is in our brain that she quickens to life. Things *are* because we see them, and what we see, and how we see it, depends on the Arts that have influenced us. To *look* at a thing is very different from *seeing* a thing. One does not see anything until one sees its beauty. Then, and only then, does it come into existence. At present, people see fogs, not because there *are* fogs, but because poets and painters have taught them the mysterious loveliness of such effects. There may have been fogs for centuries in London (...) But no one saw them, and so we do not know anything about them. They did not exist till Art had invented them.” (WILDE, 1891, my emphasis).



We are in a century of great social and spiritual undertakings, a century which, in addition to the drama of war, and the tragic figure Lenin cut as a creative force, has inherited the spirit of Oscar Wilde and the Medici, has heard the rhythms of Renée Vivien's plastic poetry²⁶, and seen under the star-studded skies of Paris, Isadora Duncan²⁷ unveiling the pale unblemished petal of her Artist's body before the ecstatic eyes of the multitude! In as audacious a century as ours, we should not be shackling Art with academic concepts and narrow, outdated ways of thinking. Indeed, ladies and gentlemen, there must be no constraints on our artistic life in a century that is, above all, an epic age of frenzy and velocity!²⁸

And yet our spirit reacts. Our sixth sense – a faculty of ours already widely publicised and frequently discussed, that allows us to understand the very soul of things, transporting us beyond them, beyond the limits of the space they occupy, and opening up for us bright new horizons of shared knowledge – provides us with the *other* life that our lives have, the one that insulates us from ordinary sensations, and saves us from having to live the lives that everyone else lives. Though pulses of sensual Beauty can be generated and experienced by all, those who are sensual to the exclusion of all else will have to content themselves with just one of Beauty's many motifs. And the problem is this: some see before seeing, while others, even as they are seeing, do not know how to see.²⁹

The souls of Artists live in the midst of the exhilarating vertigo of modern life, and so their mental life is led far away from 'well-balanced' people, far away from the *hide-bound*. Yes, [ladies and] gentlemen, for *initiates* there is but one decisive force: intelligence! And the

26. Renée Vivien (1877-1909) was a British-born *Belle Époque* writer, renowned for her openly-assumed lesbianism. In "A nova poesia portuguesa no seu aspect psicológico" [The psychological aspect of new Portuguese poetry] (1912, p.384-385), Pessoa defines "plasticity" as the poet's treatment of sights and sounds as part of the external world rather than as pure sensation.

27. Isadora Duncan (1878-1927) was a celebrated American dancer and choreographer who, like Valentine de Saint-Point, made a key contribution to the emergence and development of contemporary dance.

28. Teixeira's terms, *febre* [more frenzy than fever] and *velocidade* [velocity] are reminiscent, respectively, of the concept of *vertigem* [more rapture than delirium] developed by Raul Leal, her fellow protagonist in the *Literatura de Sodoma* affair, and of the Futurists' general fascination with speed.

29. In Florbela Espanca's short story "O resto é perfume" [The rest is perfume], the village eccentric asks the narrator: "Don't you see? (...) No, that's not possible! Your understanding is limited to perceiving the objects with which your pitiful senses present you, and how they present them to you (...) Whatever you touch with your fingers is just an illusion created by your eyes and ears. Trees! What are trees? And stones? And dust? What are they all? They are the world! But do you *see* the world?" (my emphasis; my translation).



combative life we lead in unrestrained and unruly freedom, and the enlightened³⁰ attitudes we adopt, is what so scandalises the bourgeoisie!

On this issue, Henry-Marx³¹ – that curious and subtle investigator of modern morality – has this to say: “A scandal consists of neither a person nor an act, but rather the noise made by scandalised people ...”. For me, whenever the sound of such scandalised people reaches my ears, it neither surprises me, nor does it alter my behaviour. I’ll let no one live my life for me! I alone compose and communicate the motifs with which my life pulsates.

My aim is to ascend to the very top the ladder of understanding, always questioning, always pulsating, until my intelligence provides me with the answer and I reconfigure my sensibilities accordingly. I seem to remember that it was Oscar Wilde who said: “Soul and conscience are the same thing”.³² Paraphrasing the incarcerated genius of Reading Jail, I would proclaim: “Soul and conscience are one!”

Indeed, it was in close consultation with my own soul that I resolved to come here to address you young people with your youthful intelligence on the subject of my art (which is also thoroughly youthful!) and on my notions of Beauty often so poorly-understood by those who can taste only the small portion of life that their limited objectivity feeds them.

* * * * *

And so, in conclusion, I will tell you in the politest – yes, the very politest – of terms what I think of this *Majority*, the bulk of which consists of the *gullible* and the *diminished*. They are all more or less like a certain person I once knew who had learned good manners, made himself a fortune, and so went travelling. One day this person came to tell me of his voyages. Though his descriptions were complete, perfect, I already recognised them, and he

30. Teixeira makes a pun here, somewhat difficult to reproduce in English. Literally, the adjective *desassombrado* (rendered here as “enlightened”) means removed from the shadows (unshaded) and, more figuratively, illuminated, exorcised (i.e., freed from the shadow of evil), or even fearless (i.e., free of superstitious restraints).

31. Henry-Marx (1882-1954, born Henri Marx), whose words Teixeira uses in her epigraph, was a French novelist, dramatist, poet and literary journalist. His novel *Ryls* caused a brief scandal in the 1920s due to its anarchist and homosexual themes. As yet, it is unclear from which of Henry-Marx’s works Teixeira took this quotation.

32. Though Teixeira misremembers the quote, there is much in Wilde’s philosophy – as represented by Lord Henry Wotton’s “subtle poisonous theories” in *The Picture of Dorian Grey* (WILDE, 2011, p. 67) – that aligns with the futurism she espouses. What Wotton actually says is that “[c]onscience and cowardice are really the same things” (WILDE, 2011, p.5), an idea Wilde also expressed in his 1883 verse tragedy *The Duchess of Padua* (“Conscience is but the name which cowardice / Fleeing from battle, scrawls upon its shield”), which itself was a reworking of a phrase from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (“Conscience doth make cowards of us all”).



was disappointed when I told him so, for he had visited every part of the Orient, while I had never put a foot there. I had to explain to him that everything he had described I had learned of beforehand from picture postcards. This same person insisted that he had travelled a great deal, seen half the world or perhaps all of it – I don't quite remember – and ended by declaring that he had “lived a lot”! And how many people have told me the very same thing about life in general? “I've lived a lot!” they say. And in the final analysis all they could tell me of life amounted to no more than what the photographic images on postcards might have told me! This is how living people remain strangers to life until the day they die!

In truth, only those whose intelligence has prepared them may talk of the *Machine of Life*. They observe it and they get to understand it by seeing it and by sensing it. And because they understand it, and due to the peculiar nature of their spirit, they need to devise *another life* to live within it. Confronted by the *Machine*, the *hide-bound* are simply bewildered. And since they don't understand it, they are afraid they will trap their fingers, and so they hold back. And because they don't know what it is, they grow frustrated with themselves, and with us, and with what they can neither see nor understand. And out of this frustration is born their conflict with the Idea³³ and their intransigence towards it. They just continue ploughing the same old furrow of their limited vision.

They cram their admiration for divine grace into the narrowest of creeds, and marvel at the vastness of the universe. How can the result be anything but bewilderment? And because, for them, life is full of surprises, they must always have their final passport in order: they so fear hell, they must keep on the right side of God! Some take flight. Life has hoodwinked them! They didn't understand how the *Machine* worked, and so they got their fingers trapped ...

It is easy to recognise those who were not made for living that *other life*, the intellectual life, the life of the Idea. They are like those men who have never worn evening dress: no matter how many times they try it on, it never looks right, that is, somehow it never quite fits. After all, if we believe that criminals bear all the physical traits of being precisely what they are, then surely the *limited* must have their distinctive external features, too, and they're easy enough to pick out. So, with regard to both criminals and the *limited*, we carefully keep our distance ... they are of no interest to us!

33. Here, Teixeira is probably referring to the fundamental idea underpinning her Saint-Pointian brand of futurism i.e., that men and women alike will only realise their fullest potentialities by throwing off the inhibitions that bourgeois morality imposes on them.



And, ladies and gentlemen, I'm not joking when I tell you that it is never our intention to be constantly rubbing them up the wrong way, I beg you to believe me! They are irritated by what they don't understand, astonished by our bold assertions and, either consciously devote themselves to merciless attacks on us, or strut around, senatorially feigning their indifference ... What is more, theirs is an *innocent* reaction to those who venture beyond the limits within which lesser mentalities can function – namely, the *exotics*, the *futurists*, the *crackpots*. For the *limited*, futurism is synonymous with madness.

Unfortunately, these people make up the vast bulk of our populace. And, instinctively, they protect their own grey matter, to keep it impervious to the enlightenment that shines forth from minds more cultured and intelligent than their own. They live the same good life that anyone may live but, when they choose to talk of ours, they become delirious, open fire on us, comforted by the plangent sound of their baseless insults: “Pagans! Moral bankrupts! Futurists! Raving lunatics! You should thank God we're no longer in the era of the Inquisition and the stake!” And why does all of this happen? Because *we* still form part of the complex workings of the great *Machine* in which they – whose naivety is plain for all to see – might so easily trap their fingers!

But there's even worse to come. There are those who stand out in this gullible multitude, posturing and pretending to be superior, and consider both themselves and their opinions so excellent – but who are nothing but whited sepulchres.³⁴ They fall on our ideas, mouthing them without understanding them or digesting them, and look to infiltrate the ranks of the talented... They remind me of the character who, in a play by Pirandello,³⁵ smugly

34. Here, Teixeira begins an extended pun on stones (both plain and precious) and hypocrisy (as in “casting the first stone”) which is difficult to fully replicate in English. In the original, she calls her critics *beras* (beasts), a word that literally evokes bellowing and figuratively chiding or rebuking. There is a further layer to the pun, however: in 1908, after a German counterfeiter had flooded Lisbon and Porto with counterfeit jewels, his surname Baer (rendered jokingly by the Portuguese as *bera*) came to mean anything or anyone whose immaculate exterior concealed the worthlessness or malice within i.e., a fake, as in the case of luxury items, or a ‘whited sepulchre’ or hypocrite in the case of people.

35. Teixeira provides the following reference: “Luigi Pirandello, *Da estranha tragédia de análise do conhecimento – Comme Si [sic] (ou comme Ça)*” [On the strange tragedy of analysing knowledge – Neither one thing (nor the other)]. While the meaning of the first part of the reference remains obscure, the second part refers to “Comme ci (ou comme ça)”, the 1926 French translation of Pirandello's *Così è (se vi pare)* [Right you are (if you think so)], itself a theatrical adaptation of his 1917 novella *La Signora Frola e il Signor Ponza, suo género* which ends in an unresolved dilemma. In the play, Pirandello invites the audience to come on stage during the interval, to talk to the actors, and to suggest different *dénouements* in line with their own hopes and desires. This seems fair for, in the course of the play, the characters/actors walk around the theatre and engage with the audience.



repeats, to a group of right-wingers, words he had heard directed at a group of leftists, as if the ideas were his own.

In spite of being well-disguised, these people are easily unmasked. At any time you may find yourself among them. But they end up forgetting their lines. And they make their appearance on the intellectual scene so tightly corseted, dressing up their sentences with such undue luxury, and exuding an elegance they have rehearsed in front of a mirror. In their case, the mirror consists of the Others, the truly intelligent.

Everywhere in our particular environment, we encounter herds of this species, but the only way they can move forward requires them to negotiate a narrow rickety bridge. Always suspicious, always defensive, their handsome tail-coats festooned with ill-considered ideas each hanging by a thread, they are intent on overcoming us ... But when hostilities break out, and they are called upon to act according to their newly-assumed principles, they stampede off in disarray, left wearing only the pride and moral rectitude they had donned in such haste. And, having put some distance between themselves and the lunatics (and, by the way, to them *we* are the lunatics), with great circumspection, with an official air, measured and well-pondered – and sometimes they ponder over the vacuous nothings that their great minds produce – they deliver to their peers who, according to them, are always in the majority an inventory of our vices and immoralities.

These gems of hypocrisy, who have been cut and polished with such insouciance and unparalleled vanity, can be relied upon to cast the first stone. And, since they are so numerous — after all, there's no shortage of fakes on the market — they often believe they have us under their spell! They are so *limited* themselves and yet they want to limit the paths *we* can take! What a grotesque irony! As for us – and it's not that we're inattentive – but scarcely do we see them beginning to make a fuss when ... [they desist].

As for the advanced and complex mechanism of the *Great Machine*, it only interests us inasmuch as it contributes to our analysis and understanding. We remain serene because, we have with us, in our consciousnesses, a God who forgives us for their lack of awareness [i.e., of the limited]! In his own image, the Creator fashioned us out of base clay – a small band of the elect, and endowed us with enlightenment ... As for the rest, they are no more than dross spilling off the *Machine* as it whirls in the Unconscious!

And on that note, I'll end.



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