
Gertrude Stein, T. S. Eliot and Fernando Pessoa in Three Modernist Portraits

Mário Vítor Bastos, University of Lisbon

ABSTRACT. This essay analyses the manner in which painters have striven to portray the familiar and the unfamiliar Other – here, in the figure of the writer. It focuses on the way in which the writers portrayed may have inspired the artists who did their portraits with specific visual and conceptual answers, framed within twentieth-century modernist cultural contexts. The choice of three painters (Pablo Picasso, Wyndham Lewis, Almada Negreiros) and of three portrayed writers (Gertrude Stein, T. S. Eliot, Fernando Pessoa) calls for a comparative approach: the essay traces parallels between artistic and literary personalities who were diverse but shared strong yet sometimes conflictual human bonds, in different European countries. The portraits under study reflect different stages in the individual careers of the artists involved. This essay shows that those portraits could have influenced the viewer's and/or reader's perception of the writers and that they could also have had an impact on the styles the writers or painters involved were to develop. Such intermedial dialogue is evident in Gertrude Stein, a great explorer of alterity processes in writing. The several portraits of her – starting with that done by Picasso in 1906 – were fundamental to her written *word-portraits*, which are also evidence of her taste for literary experimentation. In his portrait of Gertrude Stein, young Picasso shows indebtedness to his Parisian patroness – whom he knew little at the time – while at the same time breaking new aesthetic grounds. Over three decades later, Wyndham Lewis's seemingly satirical portrait of T. S. Eliot (1938) skilfully displays the tensions of late modernism and suggests the artist's ideological divergences with his long-time friend Eliot. In his two famous posthumous portraits of the great Portuguese modernist writer Fernando Pessoa (two portraits done respectively in 1954 and 1964), the Portuguese painter José de Almada Negreiros, nearing the end of his career, expresses a feeling of awe towards the long-gone poet – among other ideas. Through those two symmetrical yet subtly contrasted portraits of the great Portuguese poet it seems that Almada Negreiros sought to win Pessoa's accolade – the aesthetic recognition which he did not receive from Pessoa when the latter was alive.

KEYWORDS: Portraiture, Modernism, Writers, Alterity, Word/Image

Gertrude Stein, T. S. Eliot et Fernando Pessoa : trois portraits modernistes

RÉSUMÉ. Cet article propose une analyse des modalités utilisées par les peintres pour dépeindre cet Autre à la fois familier et étranger qu'est la figure de l'écrivain. Il explore la manière dont la représentation de ces écrivains a pu inspirer aux artistes des réponses conceptuelles et visuelles particulières, dans le contexte culturel moderniste du xx^e siècle. Le choix de trois peintres (Pablo Picasso, Wyndham Lewis, Almada Negreiros) et de trois écrivains (Gertrude Stein, T. S. Eliot, Fernando Pessoa) invite à une approche comparatiste : l'article s'emploie à tracer des parallèles entre des artistes et des écrivains européens de nationalité différente et en de nombreux points dissemblables ; les portraitistes et les écrivains envisagés ici ont partagé des liens humains forts mais parfois conflictuels. Les portraits étudiés se font le reflet de moments différents dans la carrière des artistes qui les ont réalisés et des écrivains qui y sont représentés. Cet essai montre que ces portraits ont pu influencer la réception des auteurs portraiturés mais qu'ils ont également pu avoir une incidence sur le style des écrivains ou des artistes visuels impliqués. Un tel dialogue intermédial se fait jour de façon évidente chez la talentueuse exploratrice du processus d'altérité qu'est Gertrude Stein. Plusieurs portraits d'elle – à commencer par celui réalisé par Picasso en 1906 – trouvent un écho dans ses portraits écrits, qui attestent également son intérêt pour l'écriture expérimentale. Dans le portrait qu'il peint de sa mécène parisienne – qu'il connaissait peu à l'époque –, le jeune Picasso rend hommage à l'écrivaine tout en frayant de nouvelles voies esthétiques. Trois décennies plus tard, le portrait apparemment satirique de T. S. Eliot réalisé par Wyndham Lewis en 1938 fait subtilement apparaître les tensions du modernisme tardif et suggère les différends idéologiques qui opposent Lewis à son ami de longue date. Dans les deux portraits posthumes qu'il a peints du grand écrivain moderniste portugais Fernando Pessoa (portraits qui datent respectivement de 1954 et de 1964), le peintre portugais José de Almada Negreiros donne, entre autres, une expression visuelle à l'admiration mêlée d'effroi que le poète depuis longtemps disparu lui inspire. À travers ces deux portraits de Pessoa, symétriques et subtilement différents l'un de l'autre, réalisés par le peintre vers la fin de sa carrière, Almada Negreiros semble être en quête de la reconnaissance esthétique qu'il n'a pas reçue de la part de Pessoa du vivant de ce dernier.

MOTS-CLÉS: portrait, modernisme, écrivains, altérité, texte/image

The portraits of writers discussed here all part company with the conventions of academic portraiture which prevailed at the beginning of the twentieth century. The painters Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), Percy Wyndham Lewis (1888-1955) and José de Almada Negreiros (1893-1970) experimented with new modes of representation to capture the features – be they physical, cultural or aesthetic – of particular writers, at a specific period in their lives and careers. Therefore, these portraits result from a conscious interpretation of writers that these painters knew more or less intimately. The pictures establish a cultural and inter pictorial dialogue with other similar paintings and suggest isolated episodes in the larger biographical narratives of the writers and painters involved, using techniques often culturally at odds with early twentieth-century art. The groundbreaking visual languages used by Picasso, Wyndham Lewis

and Almada Negreiros certainly had an impact on the viewer's and/or reader's perception of the writers. These portraits of writers also show the strength and growth of a modernist rhizomatic network rapidly crossing borders in a movement which contrasts with the coeval intense political turmoil among and inside nations.

Gertrude Stein and Pablo Picasso, or: Painting as Writing, Writing as Painting

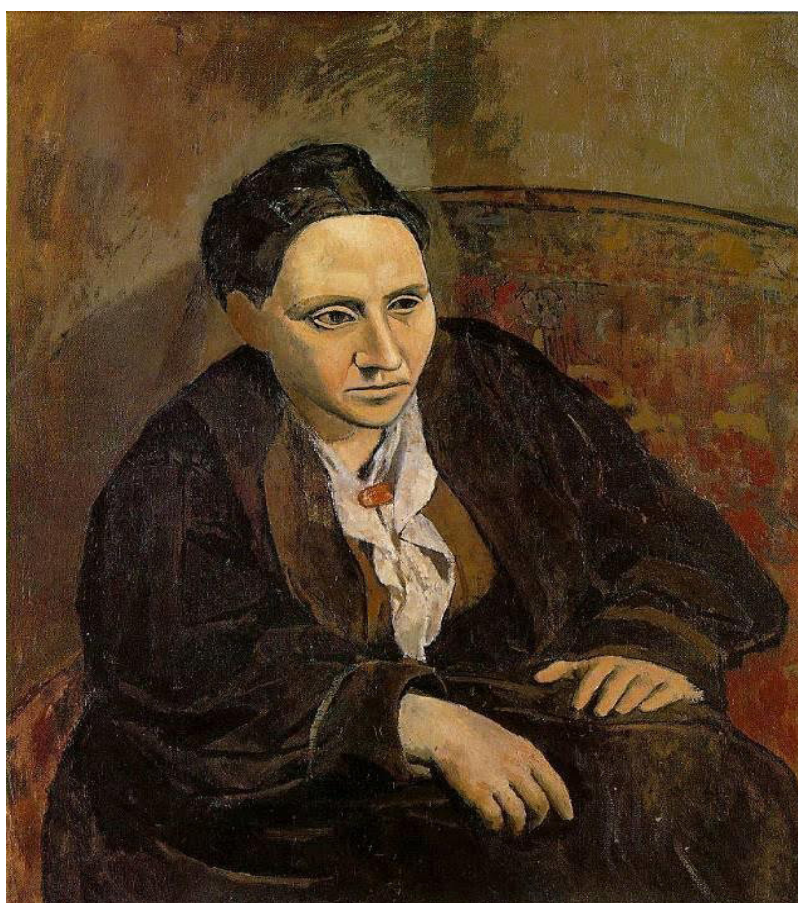


Figure 1: Pablo Picasso, *Miss Gertrude Stein*, 1905-1906, oil on canvas, 100 x 81.3 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art, New York
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The passion of the American expatriate writer Gertrude Stein (1874-1946) for the visual arts was constant throughout her life and greatly influenced her work as a creative writer and a critic. Established in Paris from 1903, she was then known for supporting several young major artists – Henri Matisse (1869-1954) and Pablo Picasso among the first – as well as writers, which slowly turned her flat situated 27 Rue de Fleurus into a modern(ist) *salon*. Stein's *salon* was to have its heyday in the 1920s, when it hosted personalities of the “Lost Generation” (Stein's phrase) (Hemingway, 1994: 27) such as Ernest Hemingway

and Francis Scott Fitzgerald. Picasso first met Gertrude Stein in Paris in 1905. This meeting coincided roughly with Stein's decision to become a writer and an art critic, and with the emergence of Picasso as a leading modernist artist. As Stein put it: "One must not forget that the reality of the twentieth century is not the reality of the nineteenth century, not at all and Picasso was the only one in painting who felt it" (Stein, 1984: 21). The famous portrait of Stein made by Picasso between 1905 and 1906 [Figure 1] became an early modernist symbol. The lexical repetitions and syntactic variations typical of most of Gertrude Stein's prolific writing,¹ suggest the influence of Picasso's de-centred pictorial methods, their lack of a stable perspective – gradually evolving, after Stein's portrait, into cubism. *Portrait of Miss Gertrude Stein* is an interpretation of the writer's personality, challenging the ways of looking at and thinking about the writer. Commenting on her portrait, Gertrude Stein wrote:

In 1906 Picasso worked on my portrait during the whole winter, he commenced to paint figures in colors that were almost monotone, still a little rose but mostly an earth color, the lines of the bodies [sic] harder, with a great deal of force there was the beginning of his own vision. It was like the blue period but much more felt and less colored and less sentimental. His art commenced to be much purer. (Stein, 1984: 21)

The portrait, although lacking a traditional perspective, conveys the impression of being *natural*. Nevertheless, the writer's posture is not spontaneous, and the image is already presenting the viewer with *another Gertrude Stein*: a staged, aestheticized, imposing woman.

This portrait, however, is far from sketchy, and results from Picasso's passionate pursuit of something new and never seen before. It was made during a long cycle of creative effort and destructive frustration which lasted almost a year and seems to herald Picasso's many metamorphic afterlives. To capture Stein's stance, Picasso had her sit eighty times (Stein, 1984: 8) over several months, from winter to spring. When he had completed the final shape of the body, he erased the provisional head (Stein, 1984: 8) and stopped his work abruptly. Picasso soon departed for a summer retreat of two months and a half at the village of Gosol in the Catalan Pyrenees. After his return to Paris in the autumn, he was at last ready to complete the portrait, that is, to paint the head, "a funny story" in the words of Gertrude Stein (Stein, 1984: 8). This long chain of failures

¹ The essay "Composition as Explanation" (1926) provides a good summary of Gertrude Stein's aesthetics. See <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69481/composition-as-explanation>>. Along with its companion piece, "Matisse", Gertrude Stein's *word-portrait* "Picasso" was published six years after the completion of her portrait, in New York in August 1912, in a special issue of *Camera Work: A Photographic Quarterly*, the pioneer American modern art magazine led by photographer Alfred Stieglitz (1864-1946). The word-portrait "Picasso" is an experimental prose poem about the charisma of the Spaniard. In 1924, a more extreme formal experiment inspired by Picasso was to appear in the American magazine *Vanity Fair*: "If I Told Him, A Completed Portrait of Picasso". See Stein, 1934: 21-25.

and the period of physical estrangement stresses Picasso's symbolic break from prevailing academic conventions.

With the partial exception of the echoes from Paul Cézanne's style – the first significant modern influence on Stein's understanding of art, Cézanne died in 1906 – Stein's portrait broke new ground. It allowed Picasso to part more strongly not only with nineteenth-century academic painting but also with his previous blue period, as well as to bring to an end his pink period. *Miss Gertrude Stein* thus heralds a new aesthetic in twentieth-century art. The final version shows a charismatic Gertrude Stein with a robust body, and face and eyes suggesting an unusual de-centred personality. Picasso's portrait, which shows her as an ageless feminine *persona*, was to condition all future depictions of her by painters, sculptors or photographers. This is obvious in the 1922 photographic portrait made by Man Ray: Gertrude Stein stands on the right side below her 1906 portrait, thereby producing an effect of *mise en abyme* and testifying to the long-lasting influence of Picasso's portrait.

The visual forms in *Miss Gertrude Stein* are slightly out of place as if the image of a solid female form were emerging out of a chaos of dark-brown and orange-brown hues, from the earth. And yet, despite the new expressive conventions, she remains recognizable. The body is seated, posing, on a sofa placed against a corner, suggested by means of a blurred vertical line behind her. Legs and feet are not visible. She wears a dark brown suit covering almost all her body, except for the light-brown orange blouse. A white scarf is tied with an orange pin. Her artist's hands rest on her upper legs and are relaxed, in particular the right one whose lower arm also seems to be resting on an invisible armchair. Her stately posture is reminiscent of a player of chess – or of a poetic game – with the hidden board placed between Stein and the other intra and extra-diegetic players: Picasso and the different viewers/interpreters of her portrait.

Her majestic and highly expressive head – the last addition to the painted body – dominates the whole picture. It seems to be carved in stone with its slightly asymmetric dark eyes, disproportionately big nose and long-closed thin lips. The dramatic effect is ambiguous: the face seems to be both dead and alive, figured and disfigured, sincere and masked, framed and unframed. The eyes appear to betray the attentive intelligence Gertrude Stein was to display in her poetic games and art criticism. They are the eyes of a mask mysteriously looking at something – not at “us” in front of the canvas – but at something outside. They are also the “eyes of Picasso” (Pound, 1975: 6 [*The Cantos*, II, 1917, 1922]), as Ezra Pound – another visitor of the salon in the Rue de Fleurus but in the early 1920s – poetically put it. The closed lips suggest the aesthetic realm, not to be confused with her daily life. Stein is seen in a secluded place, in fact her own living room, but without the several modernist canvases – including this portrait – that were soon to fill its walls and thus point to her pioneering role in the development of modernist aesthetics. Thanks to Picasso's technique, this complex of ideas and forms subtly transforms the unpoetical and the trivial into the aesthetic sublime. The real Gertrude Stein is disembodied and turned into a

feminine archetype, the Great Mother of Modernism.² Her meeting with young Pablo Picasso certainly ignited an inspirational dialogue, a new chapter in the history of modernist painting and literature.

Before and After the Vortex: the Portrait of T. S. Eliot by Wyndham Lewis in 1938

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Figure 2: Wyndham Lewis, *T. S. Eliot*, 1938, oil on canvas, 133.3 x 85.5 cm, Durban Art Gallery, © 2020 – Wyndham Lewis Estate/Bridgeman Images (United Kingdom) [This image cannot be used or copied without the permission of the Estate and Bridgeman Images]

2 According to Gertrude Stein, Picasso's mother was also a small, strong woman (Stein, 1984: 2).



Figure 3: Wyndham Lewis, *T. S. Eliot*, 1949, oil on canvas, National Portrait Gallery (NPG 5739),
© The Estate of Mrs G.A. Wyndham Lewis: The Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust.
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Painter and writer Wyndham Lewis became a friend of T. S. Eliot's at the time of the Great War, and the early poetry of Eliot appeared in the avant-garde vorticist magazine *Blast* (1914-1915) Lewis was the editor of. Born in Nova Scotia, Canada, Wyndham Lewis lived in Paris between 1902 and 1908 where he met Gertrude Stein in 1903, two years before Picasso, and frequented her *salon*. But unlike Picasso, Lewis was never close to Stein, although he shared her love for France and Spain. Picasso and Lewis represent two opposite poles of the modernist approach to the real: one passive – Picasso – the other active – Lewis. Besides, Lewis's literary as well as graphic practices complement and shed light

on each other.³ Lewis always was highly political and satirical. This, together with the fact that their aesthetics seem incompatible, may explain why Lewis neither painted the portrait of Stein nor developed a lasting friendship with her. His relation with Stein remained somewhat strained, as were his relationships with other *habitués* of the *salon* in the Rue de Fleurus in the early 1920s, such as young Ernest Hemingway, who is also known for his difficult temperament, and was somehow competing with Lewis as a writer (see Hemingway, 1996).

When the Great War broke out, Wyndham Lewis had been one of the founders of an English modernist avant-garde movement encompassing the visual arts, literature and theory. In Paris he had had contacts with the Futurists, whose aesthetic he adapted – with the help of Ezra Pound (1885-1972) – to the abstract works he produced in London. In 1914, just before the War, Lewis edited the first issue of the controversial *Blast*, the influential but short-lived avant-garde magazine which partly adapted Marinetti's "Futurist Manifesto" of 1908 to the context of early twentieth-century English art, literature and society. Lewis called that modern aesthetic Vorticism, a system wherein the dynamic concepts of force, energy and vortex are central.⁴ The second and last issue of *Blast*, in 1915, includes two poems by a then-unknown young poet, T. S. Eliot, "Preludes" and "Rhapsody on a Windy Night", which are among the first he published. Ennui and decadence inform these poems, although they also seem to hint at the avant-garde aesthetics of Futurism or Vorticism. This fact reveals the importance of Wyndham Lewis in the ascent of T. S. Eliot as the great poet – along with the slightly older Ezra Pound – of Anglo-American poetic high modernism. Lewis and Eliot toured Brittany in 1920, before Eliot started writing what was to be his most celebrated poem, *The Waste Land* (1922). Although there were many divergences between them – ideological, in particular – they remained lifelong friends.

It was in 1938, more than twenty years after the *Blast* avant-garde experiment that Wyndham Lewis painted an oil portrait of T. S. Eliot [Figure 2]. The painting seems to question the reputation of Eliot as the great English poet and literary innovator of his time, or at least to challenge it. T. S. Eliot probably sat only once for Lewis. The portrait is reminiscent of at least one photograph of the late 1930s and deserves comparison with the several pictures made since the late 1910s, depicting *other* Eliots. In 1938, Lewis painted other portraits

3 Wyndham Lewis was a prolific writer as novelist, essayist, theorist and polemicist, having also published significantly. Wyndham Lewis is also the *bête noire* of Anglo-American modernism. His novels, *Tarr* (1918), *The Apes of God* (1930), *Men Without Art* (1934) or *Revenge for Love* (1937), among others, are particularly keen on satiric narrative portraits of contemporaries, sometimes with a prophetic edge to them. His autobiography *Blasting and Bombardiering* (1937) presents the "men of 1914" as being Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, James Joyce and himself. Although his politics were not always coherent, his reputation, like that of Ezra Pound, still suffers from his tragic far-right infatuation with totalitarian regimes, in particular in the 1930s. These sympathies seem to be at a crisis when he works in 1938 on his portraits of writers. During this decade, in which he worked intensely, Lewis saw several of his paintings rejected and faced financial difficulties. For an introduction on Wyndham Lewis's work, see Edwards, 2000.

4 A vortex is roughly defined as a dynamic cluster of multiple and disparaging energies. According to Ezra Pound in his 1914 essay "Vortex": "The vortex is the point of maximum energy" (Pound, 1914).

of contemporary writers, namely Ezra Pound, Stephen Spender (1909-1995) and Naomi Mitchison (1897-1999). Represented as a man taking a siesta, Ezra Pound appears briefly alienated from the troubles of his time. To his left, a pile of newspapers and in the background a picture with a natural landscape, but nothing to suggest Pound's engagement at the time with fascist politics. Pound's aloofness and the lively hues are the dominant elements of this portrait. Stephen Spender (1909-1995) appears as a quiet young man. The image betrays nothing of his Communist sympathies of the 1930s. Along with his friend and collaborator W. H. Auden (1907-1973), Spender was a significant poet and writer of the English Left in the 1930s. The warm colours, connoting life and innocence, make this portrait the liveliest in the set. The picture of Scottish Naomi Mitchison (1897-1999) represents her dressed in blue and posing with a thoughtful expression, her left hand supporting her face, before or while writing in her big notebook. On the wall, on the left side of the canvas, behind Mitchison, a modern(ist) picture depicting the Crucifixion – with Christ in the foreground and the robbers in the background – is visible. Mitchinson was a progressive Christian and an anti-fascist British woman and, in that sense, her personality and portrait mark a stark contrast with the 1938 portrait of Eliot, a conservative Christian. Those four portraits of writers from two different generations establish a cluster – perhaps a vortex – evocative of the cultural, literary and visual debates of the time. They make up an involuntary allegory of the battling of contradictory ideas and ideologies in Britain, as Wyndham Lewis understood them, a year before the beginning of the Second World War.⁵

In that context, the 1938 portrait of T. S. Eliot subtly explores the unpoetical side of the everyday life of a prominent poet living in a period of political upheaval. It is, perhaps, the most *atypical* of the portraits of writers examined here, mainly because of its satirical dimension. Lewis had always been highly talented for finding situations suitable for satire in both painting and writing, as this portrait and several novels show, which helps to explain the unusual features of Eliot in this almost full-length portrait. The *falsity* of realism is striking. More than in *Miss Gertrude Stein*, the *accuracy* of the picture of a middle-aged Eliot is questionable, because of the expressionist and decadent suggestions conveyed. But Lewis was not willing to innovate, to “make it new”, with this portrait of Eliot, unlike Picasso in 1906, or the artists of *Blast* – including Lewis in 1914-1915. The portrait brings with it echoes of Eliot's American poetry of the 1910s – in particular of the decadent elements used in the texts published in *Blast* – and of the satirical tone of his *Poems* (1920), published before his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism in 1928 – a conversion which was to have much impact on his literary personality.

5 T. S. Eliot led a hectic life in this period. His political Christianity is also somewhat disturbing, with hindsight. In 1938, Eliot visited Portugal, invited by Salazar's Minister for Propaganda, António Ferro, as a member of the Camões Prize jury for that year, attributed to the conservative Swiss writer, Gonzague de Reynold (1880-1970), a lasting friend and correspondent of the Portuguese dictator. This leaning towards Christian-inspired authoritarianism will give way to a more tolerant idea of a Christian Society, as soon as World War II had showed all its destructive might.

The portrait also suggests both T. S. Eliot's early poetic career and his later transformation into a conservative, royalist and classical English poet-scholar after his conversion. Not surprisingly, it is reminiscent of characters in Eliot's early poetry – in particular the decaying J. Alfred Prufrock sitting on a chair. The portrait by Lewis is therefore a silent negative statement about Eliot at 50. The poet of *The Hollow Men* (1925) is depicted as a gentleman with brown, sun-tanned face and hands, as if he were on holiday at a sunny seaside resort or had just returned from a sea cruise. This aspect of the *mise en scène* may suggest passiveness and aloofness from the troubles of the times, even though Eliot was indirectly involved in the ongoing ideological debates. However, this reading of the portrait contrasts with Eliot's life at the time: he was deeply concerned about the upcoming war and busy writing his long philosophical poem *Four Quartets*. Another factor of distress to Eliot at the time was Vivienne Haigh-Wood Eliot (1888-1947), his first wife. Their long marriage was a lasting mistake on both sides and they split up in 1933. Eliot had her confined to an asylum in 1938 but they never divorced until her death in 1947.

The dominant hue of the 1938 portrait is dark blue, a cold colour. Both the chair where the poet sits and the background are in lighter colours, thus providing contrast, although also striking a possibly ominous note. In opposition to the open, relaxed hands of Stein, resting on her knees, Eliot sits with his hands clasped and a mysterious facial expression as if hiding a terrible secret. His closed and almost feminine lips keep a certain grace but do not smile. Two lateral *columns* of abstract motifs, mixing colours – cold above and warm below – frame the body of the poet. The dark blue suit and the shadow of the back of Eliot's head, oddly projected on to an empty white canvas or screen behind him, suggest a faint halo of death, the *uncanny* double of the poet. Also worthy of note is the ring with a dark stone on his little finger with no direct religious connotations. Traditionally, it conveys associations with trade, negotiations, persuasive power and the god Mercury. No marriage ring is on Eliot's fingers.

Eliot's crossed hands point to a secret, a refusal to talk about a serious matter, in contrast with the symbolism of the little finger ring. Eliot's eyes, with dark circles below them, are looking intensely perhaps to his right, either lost in his thoughts and memories or worried about something unpleasant. Unlike the round body in *Miss Gertrude Stein*, Eliot's limp body suggests emotional frozenness and an affluent lifestyle. Something seems to be dying inside the human figure portrayed, “not with a bang but a whimper” to quote the end of Eliot's *The Hollow Men* (1925) (Eliot, 1974: 92) but in the utter silence of the tight lips depicted. Like the brown gown of *Miss Gertrude Stein*, the suntan of the gentleman brings him closer to nature and life, but these features contradict the metallic dark, *dirty*, blue of the otherwise tidy, imposing suit he is wearing.

This aesthetic of the unpoetically ugly, the talent for depicting the grotesque – and the striking force of the effect obtained (the vortex) betray Lewis's ambivalent but strong feelings towards Eliot during the pre-Second World War period. Their *friendly* antagonism survived the publication of the satiric attacks contained in the novel *The Apes of God* (1930), the essay collection *Men wit-*

hout Art (1934) and the autobiography *Blasting and Bombardiering* (1937). Those works form a satirical and radical critique – and rejection – of a large part of modernist aesthetics, including Stein's experiments and Eliot's theory of poetic impersonation. They are also a great source of inspiration for the visual style explored in the 1938 portrait of Eliot. Back then, Eliot was almost *dictating* and moulding contemporary British and American literature – poetry and academic criticism in particular – as director of the publishing house Faber & Faber and editor of the literary journal *Criterion*, which ended its publication in 1939. But even then, Eliot could write deeply humane poetry as the light *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* (from 1936 to 1939) shows. However, Old Possum – Eliot's affectionate nickname, given to him by Ezra Pound – is not present in the 1938 portrait.

To make the reception and the context of this work even odder and more complicated – that is to say more energetic – Lewis tried to gain immediate public and institutional recognition for it. But when, in the spring of 1938, he submitted his portrait of Eliot to the annual exhibition of the British Academy, he saw it rejected. The picture must have displeased the members of the jury, which included his former art teacher Augustus John (1878-1961) and a significant politician who happened to be an amateur painter in his free time, Winston Churchill (1874-1965). To the jury of the British Academy, Wyndham Lewis's *T. S. Eliot* offered an abnormal if not perverse representation of someone already central in British cultural life. According to Churchill, in a speech laden with political allusions, "tradition" had to be well-served by modern art: "The function is to hold a middle course [...]. Innovation, of course, involves experiment. Experiment may or may not be fruitful. Certainly it is not the function of the Royal Academy to run wildly after novelty." (Churchill, 2012) Churchill may have had Wyndham Lewis in mind when he wrote that statement. However, when Eliot read that the Royal Academy had rejected his portrait, he immediately wrote a letter to Lewis, about how pleasurable it had been to sit for a picture whose "atypical" features he admired:

I learn from the *Telegraph* that your portrait of me has been rejected by the Academy. ~~I am not in the least surprised.~~ And For my own part I will not disguise my feeling of relief. Had the portrait been accepted by the Academy, I should have been pleased – that a portrait by you should have been accepted by the Academy would have been a good augury – at least I should have been gratified by the spectacle of the Royal Academy at Canossa, so to speak. But so far as the sitter is able to judge, it seems to me a very good portrait, and one by which posterity I am quite willing should know me, if it takes any interest in me at all. And though I may not be the best judge of it as portraiture, I am sure it is a very fine painting. But I am glad to think that a portrait of myself should *not* appear in the exhibition of the Royal Academy, and I certainly have no desire, now, that my portrait should be painted by any painter whose portrait of

me would be accepted by the Royal Academy. (Letter of T. S. Eliot to Wyndham Lewis, dated 21 April 1938, Eliot, 2019: 917-918).

Eliot was not as reticent as Churchill, although he also manifested ambivalence towards his portrait, in particular about its public exhibition in that particular year. A few days after this letter, Augustus John stepped down from the Royal Academy as a reaction against the rejection of the notorious portrait. Lewis and Eliot remained agonic friends for the rest of their lives.

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Years later, in 1954, T. S. Eliot was photographed pointing to his portrait by Wyndham Lewis with “smiling admiration.” (Meyers, 1980: 238) Lewis died the following year. Long before that, the 1938 portrait had been banned in Britain as indecent and offensive, allegedly because of the apparent phallic references in the background, one of them subtly inscribed on the top of the left lateral *column*, besides the effect made by the shadow of Eliot’s head on the white screen behind. The notoriety achieved by the portrait ended up helping Lewis to sell it for 250 pounds to an anonymous South African collector, in Durban, who later donated it to the Municipal Art Gallery of that city. The institutional reaction to this portrait was conservative in excess, almost reactionary, although understandable under the tragic historical circumstances Europe was going through, Britain in particular. From the late 1910s, Lewis did draw several antipathetic, almost grotesque heads, of Eliot. However none is more unpoetical and implicitly critical of the individual and the society he lived in than the 1938 portrait.

After the Second World War, in 1949, Lewis painted another visionary portrait of T. S. Eliot [Figure 3]. Here, his suit is a little clumsy, too large for his body, and his face is no longer brown but pale yellow, like the partially hidden hands and the background of the portrait. The dark eyes express sensitivity and intelligence and direct their attentive gaze to the left. The crossed hands and legs express self-absorption, secretiveness or perhaps shyness, but without the negative overtones conveyed by the clasped hands of the 1938 image. The 1949 version is a more straightforward and innocuous vision of a tolerant Eliot. The portrait, now at the National Portrait Gallery in London, is perhaps more congenial to Churchill’s taste and understanding of what a modern portrait is or should be, although it may be *bad* art by Lewis’s standards. The inner peace of the poet portrayed by Wyndham Lewis suggests Eliot’s religious poetry, although it is unable to erase the vortex of contradictory emotions and thoughts that the 1938 portrait still stirs in the attentive viewer.

Geometry and Magic in the Portraits of Fernando Pessoa by Almada Negreiros



Figure 4: José de Almada Negreiros, *Cabeça de Fernando Pessoa* [Head of Fernando Pessoa], 1935, © 2020 – Herdeiros de Almada Negreiros/SPA (Portugal).



Figure 5: José de Almada Negreiros, *Retrato de Fernando Pessoa* [Portrait of Fernando Pessoa], 1954, oil on canvas, 201x201 cm, Coleção do Museu de Lisboa/Câmara Municipal de Lisboa – EGEAC (nº de inventário MC.PIN.410), on loan to the Casa Fernando Pessoa, © 2020 – Herdeiros de Almada Negreiros/SPA (Portugal).



Figure 6: José de Almada Negreiros, *Retrato de Fernando Pessoa* [*Portrait of Fernando Pessoa*], 1964, oil on canvas, 226x225 cm, Coleção do Centro de Arte Moderna, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisboa, © 2020 – Herdeiros de Almada Negreiros/SPA (Portugal).

Slightly younger than the other two artists discussed here, self-taught polymath José de Almada Negreiros was, like Wyndham Lewis, active from an early age as a painter and decorative artist, and also as a writer, poet, critic, polemicist and performing artist. In his youth, he was perhaps the only self-assumed Portuguese futurist. He and António Botto (1897-1959) were the two Portuguese modernist poets that Fernando Pessoa translated into English. The literary dimension of the Almada-Pessoa friendship is reminiscent of the relations between Picasso and Stein and between Lewis and Eliot. The apparent parallels, however, end here. Short-sighted, bookish and interested in the invisible, Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935) seems to have developed his power for the visual depictions in his verse and prose by assimilating poetic-literary models. Before meeting Almada Negreiros personally, the reading of Walt Whitman provided young Pessoa with an acute awareness of the importance of having his eyes open to the outer reality if he was to write good verse. Fernando Pessoa was among the first to recognize the talent of Almada, as a young visual artist in 1913, by underlining the satirical force of his cartoons and drawings.

Fernando Pessoa is famous for his psychological system of multiple autonomous masks, his *heteronyms*, each corresponding to a different personality and self – each endowed with a distinct poetic voice, style and set of values. Each heteronym – some English – had a proper life and biography. However, there were some affinities between the main heteronyms and Pessoa himself, since they were all introduced to the art of poetry by the same Master, Alberto Caeiro, another heteronym. Excluding his poetry, Pessoa's prose includes many *visual* or ekphrastic sequences in *The Book of Disquiet* (*O Livro do Desassossego*) for instance, a work written under the name Bernardo Soares, a semi-heteronym.⁶ Pessoa also left unpublished a curious but still useful English guide to Lisbon, *What the Tourist Should See*.⁷ Furthermore, he was part of the direction board of two modernist inter-artistic reviews, *Orpheu* (1915), *Orpheu 2* (1915) – the latter being co-edited with Mário de Sá-Carneiro (1890-1916) –, and *Athena* (1924). The poem “Chuva Oblíqua” (“Oblique Rain”), published in *Orpheu 2*, is a great ekphrastic poem by Pessoa wherein the influence of the modernist paintings of the 1910s is obvious.⁸

An interesting comparative analysis between the vorticist *Blast* and the scandalous *Orpheu* is possible.⁹ In the private library of the Portuguese poet, there are the two issues of *Blast*, the review edited by Wyndham Lewis which may have influenced the launching of *Orpheu* in Lisbon as well as Almada's and Pessoa's more radical modes of literary and artistic expression in the 1910s. Like Lewis, young Almada was highly satirical of the literary milieu of his time, and like Pessoa's heteronym Álvaro de Campos in his first phase, he was influenced by Futurism and took the satirical avant-garde vein to the limits of cultural abjection.¹⁰ The Vorticism of Pound and Lewis – and its close forerunner, the Italian Futurism of Filippo Tomaso Marinetti (1876-1944) – also shows a theoretical and practical ground akin to Pessoa's and Campos's Sensationism – a neologism derived from sensation – with its motto “to feel everything in every possible way” (“Sentir tudo de todas as maneiras”, Álvaro de Campos [Fernando Pessoa], “Passagem das Horas” [“Passing of the Hours”, 1916]¹¹) and to Campos's “non-Aristotelian aesthetics” (Pessoa, 1924). The Almada of *Orpheu* also defined

6 *The Book of Disquiet* is one of the greatest works by Pessoa. It was left unfinished at the time of his death.

7 It does not seem coincidental that the title of this book of the 1920s – which remained unpublished should contain the verb *to see*.

8 The text is available on <http://arquivopessoa.net/textos/835>, last accessed 20 March 2020.

9 The executive editor of *Orpheu* was the young António Ferro (1895-1956), the very same Minister of Propaganda with whom T. S. Eliot corresponded in the mid-1930s and whom he met personally in Portugal in 1938, and as mentioned above. In 1940, Eliot published in *Faber & Faber* a book on Salazar's political doctrine penned by Ferro. Fernando Pessoa acquainted with António Ferro, but their friendship seems to have dwindled when Ferro became a central piece in Salazar's cabinet. It is usually common to see in Ferro the creator of the public image of the Portuguese dictator. But Fernando Pessoa never supported Salazar especially when he discovered that he was a totalitarian and anti-democratic politician, a dictator for life with fascist sympathies and a conservative Catholic, close to Charles Maurras, the French thinker who was incidentally also much admired by Eliot. Incidentally, Fernando Pessoa died in 1935 by the time when António Ferro was soon starting his correspondence with Eliot in order to promote his book *Salazar in England*, which was published by Faber & Faber in 1940.

10 See http://bibliotecaparticular.casafernandopessoa.pt/o-29MN_2 (last accessed 29 January 2020). Also see Silva McNeill, 2015.

11 The text is available on <http://arquivopessoa.net/textos/821>, last accessed 20 March 2020.

himself as a futurist artist and writer.¹² However, despite the apparent connection of Fernando Pessoa and his heteronyms to the visual arts, it is poetry which stands as the supreme and most abstract form of art in Pessoa's aesthetic theories.

During most of his life, Fernando Pessoa remained evasive about Almada Negreiros as a painter, but expressed admiration for him as a writer and poet. Almada's poetry – but not his visual art – appeared in the first issue of *Orpheu* in 1915. Almada did his first portrait of Pessoa as early as 1913 when the latter was 25. Pessoa's head is drawn in brown crayon, in standard figurative mode:¹³ a smiling good-natured young man recognizable as Pessoa, even though he is not wearing his iconic hat and has a slightly bigger nose. It was only in 1935, shortly after Pessoa's death, that Almada drew the first, highly stylized famous head of the poet [Figure 4], and only almost twenty years after his passing that Almada made his final and definitive two portraits – or double portrait – of Pessoa: the first, in 1954 [Figure 5] and the second, in 1964 [Figure 6]. The 1935 drawing and the two remarkable oil paintings provided the comet-like existence of Pessoa with an iconography, capable of suggesting the rich complexity of his writings. It was as if those portraits marked Pessoa's public recognition, leading to the printing of the vast bulk of his unpublished writings, only known by a few until the 1960s. After a long period in which they remained unedited, they were gradually published, attracting the curiosity of new readers, many of them becoming engaged in the in-depth study of this hyper-productive poet and writer who happened to have lived mostly in Lisbon. In 1964, ten years after the completion of the first portrait, a replica was made. The two paintings ended up forming a *mirror-portrait* crucial to the public recognition of Almada, in the last years of his life, as a crucial modernist artist, as well as to the interest in the endless writings of Pessoa.

These oil paintings have roughly the same dimensions as the portraits of Gertrude Stein and T. S. Eliot previously discussed, although the message and emotions expressed diverge. Just as Stein by Picasso and Eliot by Lewis, the portraits of Pessoa by Almada are characterised by a theatrical *mise and scène*: Pessoa seems engaged in conversation, smoking and apostrophising someone, before starting to write. More broadly, it represents the moment of gathering inspiration and mental strength before setting pen to paper. Almada's portraits of Pessoa differ from the hieratic stance of Stein by Picasso, or from the satirical image of Eliot suggested by Lewis. Fernando Pessoa, as portrayed by Almada, is sitting at a table, facing and talking to someone who is not the viewer. The inner space depicted suggests one of the several literary cafés in downtown Lisbon in the early twentieth century, being perhaps a synthesis of them all.

12 Other aesthetic doctrines converge in *Orpheu* like the "Intersectionism" of (again) Pessoa, a literary practice inspired partially by cubism but quite different in form from the experimental writing of Gertrude Stein. Pessoa's poem "Chuva Oblíqua" is a good example of the "intersectionist" aesthetic. See note above.

13 In 1915, Almada made a drawing of Pessoa whose waving body there reminds the art-nouveau style. In 1935, the year of the death of Pessoa, Almada also drew what is perhaps his most impressive head of Fernando Pessoa.

The first portrait was commissioned to Almada by *Orpheu's* poet and journalist Alfredo Guisado (1891-1975), who had also published decadent verse in *Orpheu* and was a friend of Pessoa's. Guisado's family owned a café-restaurant called *Irmãos Unidos* (*United Brothers*) – situated in the *Rossio* (King Pedro IV Square) in downtown Lisbon – which was popular among writers and artists. Guisado aimed to display Almada's portrait at *Irmãos Unidos* because the magazine *Orpheu* – its second issue, in particular – was perhaps born there. Pessoa's portrait in the restaurant was meant as a *memento* and a homage to the many hours Pessoa spent writing in the old town cafés in the first decades of the twentieth century. A sad sign of changing times, *Irmãos Unidos* closed its doors in 1969, and shortly later, Pessoa's first portrait by Almada was auctioned, becoming the most expensive Portuguese painting at the time. It was later donated to the Lisbon City Hall until being on loan at the *Casa Fernando Pessoa* (*Fernando Pessoa House*) – which opened to the public in 1993 – where it is now displayed.

In 1964, ten years after the completion of the first portrait, Almada painted another oil portrait of Pessoa, this time commissioned by the Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon. The new picture is almost the perfect inverted image of the original, which seems to have served as a model. These two portraits of Pessoa are often mistaken, especially when looked at from a distance for the first time, or when seen in reproductions. In these two portraits, like Picasso and Lewis, Almada presents another enigmatic writer, although Pessoa is recognizable to those familiar with photos of him. In both, the poet is wearing a black hat and is sitting at a clean café table reminiscent of a writing desk. Although this is a public space, no one is near the poet's table, which occupies most of the central foreground. This contrast offered with the busy life of the café underlines the idea of inhabiting a parallel reality more clearly than the portraits of Stein and Eliot discussed above, in which both writers *inhabit* private spaces. However, Pessoa, who was probably the more secluded of the three, appears in a busy urban public space. He is represented talking to someone, maybe himself or one of his heteronyms, but no one else is visible except the poet. Almada tries to convey an impression of solitary reserve by picturing Pessoa in a (pseudo-) open space, made somewhat unreal through geometrisation and lighting. The very presence of Pessoa in an ordinary place seems to turn it in a highly aesthetic place.

Lewis and Almada painted almost full-length portraits of their models. Nevertheless – and although Almada had been a cartoonist and satirical writer – the similarities between the two images end here. Where Lewis had made a satiric portrait of Eliot in 1938, Almada reveals a mysterious and hermetic Pessoa. Again, the *mise en scène* helps to explain the apparent openness of Pessoa's body language as compared with Eliot's self-absorption and unwillingness to talk revealed by Lewis. Pessoa's hands tend to converge towards the centre of the table, one holding a cigarette, another with fingers apart, gently hovering over a blank sheet of paper. The long delicate fingers of the moving hands suggest acute sensitivity. Another focus of attention lies in the representation of the second volume of *Orpheu* on the table, incidentally the only book

in these portraits of Pessoa. The presence of the number 2 on the book cover suggests the presence of Pessoa in Almada, and Almada in Pessoa. This metonymic device also associates Fernando Pessoa to Alfredo Guisado – the poet of *Orpheu* whose family owned the restaurant *Irmãos Unidos* – and to Mário de Sá-Carneiro, the other co-director of *Orpheu 2*. Such duality also evokes a mirror-like effect, the symbolical potency of that number. *Orpheu 2*, which appears at the bottom corner of the table, inside an illuminated rectangle, stands apart from the space where sharp straight lines portray the poet's body in the shade. The image of *Orpheu 2* reappears in other paintings and drawings by Almada, for instance in a 1954 work depicting an informally sitting young couple at a table, with the girl reading the volume.¹⁴ At the time of composition, *Orpheu 2* was an obsession for Almada and may have inspired the project of the inverted portrait of Pessoa at the café table in 1964.

The absence of the sitter during the painting sessions sets Almada's two portraits of Pessoa apart both from the 1906 *Miss Gertrude Stein* and from the 1938 *T. S. Eliot*. As previously mentioned, in Gertrude Stein's portrait, her head was the last part of the body that was painted, and Picasso finalized it without the presence of the writer. Forced to rely on photographs, perhaps sketches, and mainly on his visual memory of Pessoa as a young writer to portray him, Almada did something perhaps more radical than Picasso or Lewis, in order to present an absence. Pessoa died in 1935. The memory of Almada had to go back, in particular, to 1915 and 1916 – the years of *Orpheu* – the period when he often met Pessoa, Guisado and Sá-Carneiro, among other collaborators of the magazine, at the *Irmãos Unidos* and other literary cafés in Lisbon. The image of Pessoa is not strictly *cold* although it does not hint at sensuality, sentimentality or pathos. The face or rather mask of Pessoa stands in contrast with the aesthetic and geometrical environment – marked by sharp contrasts between warm and cold colours – where the body of the poet, dressed in a sober, elegant black suit and bow tie, captures a symbolic stasis. The background of the scene is a dark and shady space somewhat reminiscent of a Platonic cave. Unlike the Eliot of Wyndham Lewis in 1938, Pessoa is slim, almost fragile, short-sighted, focused on talking and ready to write. His feet, but not his legs, are crossed; his elbows, forming opposing triangles, are slightly distorted and extended, contrasting with Eliot's crossed hands and with the relaxed hands of Gertrude Stein. In these three examples, the hands of the writers talk but what they say is different in each case.

Young Almada had been very fond of drawing and painting Harlequins, and the body and suit of this *Commedia dell'Arte* character may have inspired this image of Pessoa. Nevertheless, the geometric colouring of the Harlequin's suit seems to have been projected into the space around Fernando Pessoa at the café, leaving his body dark. Another palimpsestic character *disguised* in both portraits of Pessoa is the figure of the Magician as in the Marseille tarot card, but in toned down colours, seated and with a different set of symbols on the

14 A reproduction painted on tiles of this portrait sequence can be seen today at Saldanha metro station in Lisbon.

table, as if Pessoa were his dark modernist avatar. Unlike the backgrounds of the portraits of Gertrude Stein and T. S. Eliot, the interior behind Pessoa is striking because of its geometric proliferation of contrasting vertical and horizontal lines. Almada's last phase in the 1960s is dominated by abstract geometry without human presence. Pessoa's two portraits seem to provide the right transition while invoking a pictorial practice of his Sensationism and particularly of his Intersectionism of the 1910s. In fact, in his later years, the painter-poet developed a highly personal interest in the study and application of geometry as part of a metaphysical quest. The 1954 and 1964 portraits of Pessoa, with their combination of figuration and abstraction, stand at the crossroads where those two aesthetic modes intersect. Geometry is used as a background, suggesting colourful Portuguese tiles, which in their turn resemble the pattern of a Harlequin's costume. This visual convergence is not only reminiscent of the almost ubiquitous presence of Harlequin in Almada's early iconography but brings to mind the colourful tiles – mostly blue – of the interiors of public and private spaces of many parts of downtown Lisbon.

In the first of the two portraits, Fernando Pessoa is probably pictured at dawn. The second portrait has him illumined by either sunlight or electric light. The two almost identical and symmetrical images contribute to an intentional mirror-like double portrait, suggesting a *mise en abyme*, multiplying *ad infinitum* the geometrical figure of the poet, pictured in a café room full of mirrors. This recalls the multiple poetic, literary and philosophical selves, the heteronyms which Pessoa created. Indeed, these portraits are so similar that, at first sight, they only seem to replicate one another, as in photography. On closer inspection, however, one notices that they are different from one another: not even the hats Pessoa wears are similar. The two portraits show two apparently very similar characters or persons – in Portuguese “Pessoa” means *person*. The geometrical background of the figure in black, in the foreground, is an allusion to the *magical* symbolist universe of most of the verse published in *Orpheu*. At first sight, the only element that comes to light from the beautiful but shady space is *Orpheu* 2. However, there are other differences: in the 1954 portrait Pessoa's body is mainly in the shade, while the 1964 picture has his body in the light, suggesting exposure to the sun, or to electric light, during an evening at the *Irmãos Unidos*. Almada explored a synthesis of modernist visual modes, to aestheticize the body image of the poet and enhance his myth. Almada's portrait of Pessoa is filled with rich and complex meanings, which contrasts with the poet's almost uneventful life. In that sense, the two portraits capture a mysterious non-biographical entity who was a sort of poetic medium and a cartoon-like puppet in the hands of his creations, deftly suggesting the complexity of Fernando Pessoa at work within the context of the modernist period of the 1910s.

Conclusion

The three painters discussed rhizomatically share the modernist aesthetic tenets which gradually spread across Europe, to the Americas and the world at large, along with technological progress, after the end of the nineteenth century. Technology and semantics serve a common (under)ground for authors, painters and writers, who, at first sight, do not have much in common but end up being part of a vaster group of creative minds of which they provide a synecdochic window. A vast visual-literary grammar comes to life with primitivist elements, masks, visual illusions and allusions, grotesque figurative distortions, geometric abstractionism, and the passive and active use of dramatic effects. Thus, *reading* an *authoritative* visual portrait of a writer may equal, counterbalance or support the reading of their texts. These portraits interweave illusion and truth and succeed in capturing and enhancing charismatic – now mythical – creative personalities. There are conflicts and tensions between the immediate portrait meanings and their more complex latent ones. They perform new modes of making, seeing and interpreting the portraits, which grow into short visual modernist narratives, silent and immobile fragments of personal biographies, almost confessional visual poems. These portraits are just a small part of the oxymoronic visual literature and they illustrate with eloquence the inter-arts process, central in modernist aesthetics.

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