

JAIME CORTESÃO

(Ançã, 29/04/1884 – Lisbon, 15/08/1960)

Politician, writer and historian, Jaime Cortesão was a distinguished figure in Portuguese culture. Of his considerable intellectual production, he is best noted for his historical research, and for the political side to his life, he is remembered for an enduring civic commitment that expressed itself in different moments and through distinct initiatives, but always guided by democratic values.

Although he attended courses in both Greek and Law, Jaime Cortesão would end up completing his studies at the Lisbon Medical-Surgery School in 1910. However, medicine was not to be the chosen career of this intellectual who, from early on, cultivated a knowledge of the arts and the various branches of culture. His extensive interests were displayed in the topic explored in his final thesis for his degree *A arte e a medicina. Antero de Quental e Sousa Martins*. In 1907, by the age of 23, the writer had already founded the literary journal *Nova Sylva*, along with Leonardo Coimbra, Cláudio Basto and Álvaro Pinto, in which he published his poems and drawings (Carvalho 1992). After the Republican revolution of 5 October 1910, Jaime Cortesão settled in Porto, where he taught in high school way and entered politics, becoming a member of parliament for the Portuguese Republican party/Democratic party representing the city of Porto. During this period, he was one of the driving figures for the *Renascença Portuguesa* movement, with Teixeira de Pascoais and Leonardo Coimbra, among others, as well as being an active contributor to the journal *A Águia*. Also as part of this movement, he embarked on the educational project to set up the Popular Universities and directed the journal *A Vida Portuguesa*.

Before initiating an important historiographical work, Jaime Cortesão made a brief incursion into theatre, writing three plays which premiered in Lisbon: *O Infante de Sagres*, an epic drama in 4 acts, (Teatro da República, previously Teatro D. Amélia, 1916), *Egas Moniz*, drama in 4 Acts, (in the same place, renamed Teatro São Luiz, after dropping the name «Republic» in tribute to its founder, the Viscount São Luiz de Braga; 1919) and *Adão e Eva*, play in 3 acts (Teatro Ginásio, 1921). The first of these plays was dedicated «to the mariners of Portugal», and centred around the figure of the Infante Dom Henrique (Prince Henry the Navigator). Great care went into researching this period of the 15th century, for which he relied on the collaboration of reputed historians, learned specialists in various areas, such as Joaquim de Vasconcelos, Luciano Pereira da Silva, António de Vasconcelos and Pedro de Azevedo, director of the national archives of the Torre do Tombo (Carvalho 1992); the play having received «unanimous critical acclaim, had its set designed by José Mergulhão who, true to naturalist form, faithfully reproduced the hall of the Monastery of Batalha for the third act of the play» (Bastos / Vasconcelos 2004: 100). In *Egas Moniz*, the playwright drew on Portuguese legends and gave dramatic form to the collective dream, pursuing the same pedagogic and civic ideals that had shaped *O infante de Sagres*: «the patriotic goals of *renascente* (from the *Renascença* movement), the pragmatic sense of art that I wanted to place at the service of the heroic resurgence of Portugal» (Cortesão 1960). Luiz Francisco Rebello remarks on the return of historical drama in the midst of the Republican regime, reanimated by playwrights nostalgic for the deposed regime, such as Vasco de Mendonça Alves (1883-

1963) and Rui Chianca (1891-1931), but compares their «traditionalist revivalism» to the «democratic and progressive vision of history» of Jaime Cortesão (Rebello 2010: 115).

In 1921, year of the premier of *Adão e Eva*, Jaime Cortesão distanced himself from the *Renascença* Group and Pascois' *Saudosismo* movement, and began associating with the founders of the *Seara Nova* movement, namely, Aquilino Ribeiro, Augusto Casimiro, Azeredo Perdigão, Câmara Reis, Faria de Vasconcelos, Ferreira de Macedo, Francisco António Correia, Raul Brandão and Raul Proença. By that time, the author had already fought in the First World War as a volunteer doctor in the trenches of Flanders, as well as having been targeted during the repression of the government of Sidónio Pais. Consequently, the playwright abandoned the historic past and situated his new drama in the post war period, highlighting the social and spiritual crisis that was being felt during the troubled times of the end of the first Republic. Yet, he continued to offer a return to hope and belief in a revolution capable of creating a society based on fraternal values. In fact, as Luiz Francisco Rebello points out, commenting on the ending of the play, «“Day breaks... Life begins...” are the words with which the drama closes and that the author has placed in the mouth of the protagonist, a revolutionary idealist who rejects the use of violence, but still identifies with the revolution and who for his loyalty, is persecuted and arrested » (Rebello 1998: 12). The play, directed by Araújo Pereira, provoked furious debate, and was defended by Raul Brandão – whose singular dramaturgy also reflected the deep crisis of the period – in an statement published in the *Diário de Lisboa* on 1 June 1921: «Throwing this out onto the stage with a play in which the author debates with himself, and when it is perhaps his own conscience that he is laying bare; in which we feel there is someone crying out, who despairs, who is being torn apart – it's beautiful but dangerous» (Brandão 1986: 189). David Mourão-Ferreira recognises «modern» theatre in the play, and even a «theatre of situations» in the Sartrean sense of the word, where certain problems were debated that would be fundamental to Sartre's own dramatic work: the problem of freedom, the problem of choice and even (although only touched upon) the problem of illegitimacy» (Mourão-Ferreira 1970: 200).

The author of *Adão e Eva* went into exile after the bloody repression following the military revolt of 3 February 1927, having lost his job as director of the National Library, a post he had occupied since 1919. He went to live in Spain and France and returned to Portugal in 1940, where he was arrested at the frontier and imprisoned in the Peniche fort and later, Aljube. The following year, he left for Brazil, where he wrote an important historical work about Portugal's overseas expansion and the formation of Brazil, only returning to Portugal for good in 1957. Although he had no affiliations to a political party, a position he was to maintain after the First World War, Jaime Cortesão continued to fight for democracy, taking part in Humberto Delgado's political campaign. He was arrested for the last time in 1958, when already 74 years old, and in the same year he was elected President of the Portuguese Society of Writers by his peers. After his death, the figure of Jaime Cortesão continued to be a model of resistance for the opposition during Salazar's *Estado Novo*, his attitude of standing up to dictatorial governments having left an enduring memory.

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Rita Martins

Sebastiana Fadda

Translated by Amanda Booth