

## ANTÓNIO PATRÍCIO

(Porto, 07/03/1878 – Macau, 04/06/1930)

António Pires Patrício studied mathematics in Porto, then attended Naval School in Lisbon and, returning to his native city, obtained a degree in medicine in 1908. He chose, however, to pursue a diplomatic career. In 1911 he was appointed Consul of Canton (Guangzhou). He remained in China for two years and from there was transferred to Manaus. In 1914 he was posted to Bremen and at the end of the war he was assigned the headquarters in Athens. He then took up office in Constantinople, where he received news of his appointment as Minister Plenipotentiary. He also passed through Caracas and London before returning to Portugal. In 1930, his health already failing, he was appointed Minister of Beijing. However, he was never to arrive there because he died in Macau, where he had stopped off for a meeting with the governor.

Whilst politically he was a staunch Republican, as an intellectual, António Patrício had an aristocratic view of knowledge and existence that reflected the decadent tastes of the times, characterised by a certain elegant snobbishness, a visible disdain for the trivial, a predilection for certain crepuscular atmospheres, Nietzschean aspirations and a spirituality of «Dyonisiac tension» that went beyond the Christian God, in a kind of «pantheist mysticism» (Rodrigues 1976: 802).

His travels left their traces in his literary work, where he gained recognition for his poetry (*Oceano*, 1905; *Poesias*, published posthumously, 1942), narrative (*Serão Inquieto*, 1910) and theatre. In this last genre, he is noted for his contribution to the legacy of Portuguese Symbolist Theatre «whose aesthetic retains its essence, although at times the language strays into the decadent tastes of the times», but always aspiring towards a poetic theatre: «whilst approximations with the great names of Symbolism are evident – the concept of Maeterlinck's 'static drama', the verbal affectation of D'Annunzio, the poetic charge of Yeats – there is in Patrício's theatre, a human resonance to which the latent or manifest, but always haunting presence of death confers a truly tragic dimension» (Rebello 1984: 108).

His five published plays are all permeated with a sense of dissolution and presence of death.

*O Fim* (1909) is an historic drama in two acts that alludes to the Lisbon regicide and foretells the fall of the monarchy. It was seen as a forerunner of the Theatre of the Absurd, but of «an Absurd open to history», narrating the «tragedy of a race that commits suicide» and where «Man's destiny» is played out. «Here, the mad Queen Mother is also the Country, dying of hunger, dreaming of fascinating and grandiose banquets, chewing on the remains of a mythified past (...) Poem of an extreme pessimism in which for some fleeting moments the shadow of Shakespeare lingers, reincarnated in Beckett (...) 60 years before Ionesco, António Patrício proclaims the King is dead» (Porto 1973: 216-217). Ignored for decades, this play was more recently rediscovered and presented for the first time under the direction of Jorge Listopad (Casa da Comédia, 1971). Since then it has enjoyed surprising success, and has regularly appeared in the repertoires of both amateur and professional companies.

*Pedro o Cru* (1913, published in 1918), defined by the author himself as «a tragedy of longing», of nostalgia for a lost love due to the death of the beloved, represents the transition, or rather, constituted «the connecting link between Symbolist Decadence (...) and the *Saudosismo* movement of Pascoaes, the symbiosis, one could say, that led to the

*Paulismo* movement of the *Orpheu* group, in other words, the first phase of modernist literature» (Simões 1985: 256). In this version of the famous mythologised story, the death of Inês, Pedro is driven by his desire to elevate and transcend what perishes. The protagonist, «having gone beyond the human condition itself, is intent on penetrating eternity, the world of divinized man, always in search of a full existence, in absolute communion with the object of his love. The consciousness that reality is not something objective and unalterable, but rather constructed largely from the relationship that we have with it, allows Pedro to create new principles, by establishing new values» (Vasconcelos 2005: 660). The play was broadcast by RTP in 1974 and premiered at the Teatro Nacional D. Maria II in 1982.

With *Dinis e Isabel* (1919) the playwright wanted to transpose the tragedy « of a man who loved a saint» into five acts. The Shakespearean subtitle – « Spring's Tale» – reveals his lyrical intentions, which reach a climax in the last act as a «static tragedy», since the action has already tapered off in the previous act. An excerpt of the first act was presented for the first time in 1931 at the Teatro Nacional Almeida Garrett (now the Teatro Nacional D. Maria II), on the occasion of the world premiere of *Um sonho (mas talvez não)* by Luigi Pirandello, who was in Lisbon as guest of honour of the Fifth Congress of the International Confederation of Dramatic and Musical Criticism. A new staging took place at the Teatro da Politécnica (Teatro da Trindade, 1992).

His « tragic fable» in three acts, *D. João e a máscara* (1924, which was first performed by an amateur group in 1980, and later by professional actors in 1989), uses one of Shakespeare's phrases as its epigraph, «*Nothing can we call our own but death*. The play is a version of the myth of Don Juan, ignoring the anecdotal aspects of the story to reveal an « instinctive believer», an « amoral mystic» who out of all the women he loved, in the end loved the mask of only a single woman: death. This interpretation would also fascinate Natália Correia for the reinterpretation she created in *D. João e Julieta* (1957).

Finally, the one act *Judas* (1924) was first staged by the Grupo de Teatro Moderno da Faculdade de Letras (Teatro do Ginásio, 1946), to later become part of the *Cenas da vida de Benilde*, based on *Benilde ou a Virgem Mãe* by José Régio, performed by the Grupo Teatro Hoje (Teatro da Graça, 1990).

Besides having contributed to the magazines *Águia*, *Límia* and *Atlântida*, the author also left behind several unfinished texts: *O Rei de sempre* (1914, written in Bremen), «our tragedy» based on the theme of *Sebastianismo*, in five acts; *A paixão de mestre Afonso Domingues* (1929, written in Nazaré; performed at the Teatro Nacional D. Maria II, 1985), an incomplete historical drama in three acts, based on the novel *A abóbada* by Alexandre Herculano; *Auto dos reis ou da estrela* (September 1929, fragments); *Teodora*, «a dream of Byzantium», of which just a few notes remain about the structure and drafting of scenes; *Diálogo na Alhambra*, fragments published for the first time in the pages of the periodical *A labareda* (Porto, 1914) and republished almost a century later.

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**This translation is based on the updated Portuguese version of the bio-bibliographical information of António Patrício edited in: Sebastiana Fadda (editor), *Teatro portoghese del XX secolo*, Roma, Bulzoni Editore, 2001, which includes the complete translation of the play *La fine*. It also replaces the 1st Portuguese version published online in: <[http://cvc.instituto-camoes.pt/teatro-em-portugal-pessoas/antonio-patricio-dp12.html#](http://cvc.instituto-camoes.pt/teatro-em-portugal-pessoas/antonio-patricio-dp12.html#.WhQNusODPNM)>.**

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