

LOCAL ANTHROPOGENIES - LINGUISTICS

LOGICS OF TEN INDO-EUROPEAN LANGUAGES

8. PORTUGUESE AND THE OCEAN

Já no largo Oceano navegavam, / As inquietas ondas apartando ; / Os ventos brandamente respiravam / Das naus as velas côncavas inchando.

They were already sailing on the large Ocean / Separating the worried waves; / The winds breathed suavely / Swelling the concave sails of ships. Camões, Os Lusíadas

Portuguese topples to the west, against Europe. This slope has discouraged its population from invading the neighbouring plateau of the Spanish meseta, and endlessly drifted it away to the oceanic, western elsewhere. Pessoa uses this remarkable topology for the introductory poem of *Mensagem*:

« A Europa jaz, posta nos cotovelos: / De Oriente a Ocidente jaz, fitando. (...) /// Fita, com olhar esfíngico e fatal, / Ocidente, futuro do passado. / O rosto com que fita é Portugal'. (“Europe lies, resting on her elbows: / From east to west it lies, staring. (...) /// It stares, with her eyes of sphinx and of destiny / at the West, future of the past. / The face with which it stares is Portugal.”)

Territory has no heart, it has no belly button, but it has a catastrophe point, Cabo da Roca, the most western point of the European continent, where the earth ends and the sea begins, “onde a terra se acaba e o mar começa”. In this case, ‘o mar’ is not simply a sea, like the Mediterranean, with hovering waves and tepid waters, mare nostrum, but the ocean, the Atlantic, which carries the cold waters that the swell brings from very far away, from elsewhere, indefinitely. Hence, the Roman colons of Portugal were not only speakers from the extremity of the empire, like the Romanians. They felt far away from its centre, Rome, and far away from themselves because of the call from the aquatic immensity towards which the toppling of the relief dissolved them. Not a call from the Sunrise but a call from the Sunset.

So much so that the nostalgic faraway of space doubles with a nostalgic faraway of time. The defeat of Alcacer Quibir, where on 4 august 1578 King Sebastian, then aged 18, perished and literally disappeared (*desapareceu*), would probably have created a trauma elsewhere, particularly that it succeeded one century of glory and did not go without the guilt of a first social slackening. But nowhere else would the young volatised king have become the desired, Sebastião o Desejado, giving way to an unflagging and insisting remembrance. The

“sebastianistas » hope that one day the shadow of the disappeared will come back from the “supple Tague” on a foggy morning, from West to East, and at counter-sun (the inverse movement to the Mexican Quetzalcoatl).

8A. The language

The Portuguese language developed as a constant practice of desire, if it is true that desiring is grasping from the stars, ‘de-sidera’. And it fundamentally succeeded this party in the hypertrophy of the vocal nasalization.

8A1. Nasal Phonosemics

Nasalization allows, by lowering the soft palate, to resound for a more or less long time the vocal emissions in the nasal cavity, hence rendering the sound ambivalently pectoral and cerebral. A little everywhere, it develops in the consonants ‘m’, ‘n’ (sometimes ‘ng’). But it can even reach vowels. The Greeks, who are always in the awakening of the emotion, did not nasalize in this strong sense. At the opposite, the Latins, who promoted sentiments as much as they promoted law, ended up saying something like ‘bonûst’ while they still wrote “bonum est”, as we learn in the count of their verses. The nasalization of ‘m’ had led to that of the ‘u’ (ou), which in turn had made the ‘m’ superfluous. We cannot understand Virgil’s mixture of firmness and tenderness, or the wailing of Saint Augustine, or the amorous fury of Catullus if we do not sufficiently understand their nasal vowels.

Italian speakers first evacuated the Latin nasalization, which would have altered the exact concord that they pursued in their voice. Spanish speakers would have done the same, because it would have compromised their affronted provocation. On the other hand, French speakers gave it more than its due. It was a means of comforting a general party of neatness by mixing the maximal gap of phonemes, but also of favouring a subsidiary party, the own judgement, by allowing the speaker to show a permanent reserve through sufficiently suppressed multiple sounds. Assuredly, this double objective supposed simple and short nasal vowels, which were not too insistent or fleeing. The French of “oil” (versus “oc”) held on to the ‘a’, ‘è’, ‘oe’, ‘o’, meaning: ‘an’, ‘in’, ‘un’, and ‘on’. Logically excluded were the nasals of ‘ou’ and of ‘i’, too noisy.

The Romans of Lusitania, on the border of the faraway-close of the oceanic setting, pushed the vocal nasalization to the extreme. They assuredly maintained the Latin practice: ‘m’ and ‘n’ and continued to resorb in the anterior vowel not only for ‘em-en’, ‘om-on’, ‘am-an’, but also for ‘im’ and ‘oum’, which in itself unsettles the French speaker. Furthermore, they dug like an echo the ‘ôn’ of ‘cônchas’. This echo redoubled in ‘coração’ due to the fact that the nasal vowel preceded a buccal vowel, and even more in ‘João’, or ‘leão’, where it repercutated between two buccals. All these labyrinthic returns signalled by the til (the Spanish tilde is content with watering ‘n’) increasingly ruled the entire phonics that ‘ão’ concluded the numerous abstract

vocables formed from the Latin accusative 'tionem': 'nasalação', 'união', 'ligação', 'perturbação', etc.

The 'fado', this popular song inherited from the Latin factum, this incurable destiny invades everything. The Latin endings in 'um' produced an 'o' that is pronounced 'ou' that liquefies the ending ('edicto' said 'edictou') where the Italian 'editto' and the Spanish 'edicto' put in place an anaptyctic 'o', while the French, suppressing the 'um' completely, obtained the maximal decision by the cleaver of the final tonic vowel (édit). The final 's' of syllables suppressed into 'ch' without the lips going forth (hence without the sensuousness of Brassens in his "*Chasses aux papillons*"): 'naus' (ship) was almost pronounced 'naouch', and 'esta' (this) 'ech/ta'. The Latin initials 'cl' and 'pl', that were too launched, in turn became 'ch': 'clavem' became 'chave'. The final 'l' palatized: 'til' is pronounced 'tilli', contrasting with the Spanish 'tilde' (ld). The 'fadingue' went as far as to erase vowels in non-accentuated vowels, to the point that it created 'murmur vowels': 'Pessoa' becomes 'p;soa'. At this rate, it was impossible that the Portuguese spelling should be phonetic like its Spanish counterpart, and the 'x' for instance, has five values.

8A2. Syntax

The Lusitanian syntax settled in this same existential attitude with its own means, meaning that it privileged reflexivity and mentalism. It is probably in the Portuguese language that the Latin infinitive preposition, which allows to present wordings as though it was structured by the thought of someone else (let us recall the endless "indirect" discourses of Livy), remained the most vivacious: 'Ele julgava ser eu feliz' (he deemed me be happy). Similarly, some Portuguese speakers pleasantly say that put half their verb in the subjunctive, mentalist mode per se (in the Latin indirect subordinate clauses, it ensured the 'alienating' structure of the infinitive in the principal). Then, the reflexive pronoun and even the simple personal pronouns are placed here after the verb (always the final return) while being intimately linked to it with a hyphen: 'tu lavas-te', 'impressionar-nos'. The reflexivity is at times almost expletive: 'a que haja de se fazer referência' (to which one must make reference< to oneself>). The complex conjunctions spread out: 'a ideia fundamental do soneto é <a de> que (...)'. Here, the pedantic academic discourse is even more diffuse than it is elsewhere.

8A3. Semantics

This party of existence had to be summarised in one word that was simultaneously fetish and invocation, the « saudade ». Breeding the Latin ancestors 'solitatem' (solitude) and 'salutationem' (greetings), blend of aspiration and languor, the 'saudade', whose feminine gender is by no means innocent, is defined as the 'suave and sad remembrances of persons that are faraway or dead' "a lembrança / triste e suave / de pessoas ou coisas / distantes / ou extintas » It comprises, continues the *Pequeno Larousse*, a blend of 'cumprimentos' and of 'lembranças afectuosas, dirigidas a pessoas ausentes (absent persons)'. Hence, the Portuguese speaker is not emotive like the Greek speaker, nor sentimental like his roman counterpart: he lives of emotions more than of passions ('a predominação da emoção sobre a paixão'), but of

emotions that modulate a unique sentiments (Pessoa accepts 'sentimento', even if he excludes the Spanish 'paixão').

To the extent that all other psychological terms comprises a coefficient of 'saudade', for instance 'alheação' (more vulgar derivation), 'alienação' (more scholarly derivation), 'lembrança', 'suave', this adjective that is so evocative (it is present in the definition of the 'saudade' and in the 'brandamente' of Camões) that it gave its name to a brand of cigarettes. Evidently, to weight the semics of a word, it should not be separated from its phonation, and the 'saudade' inherent to 'alheação' is largely due to its final '-aô', and to the gradual reduction of the Latin 'n' between the 'e' and the 'a', its nasalization being assumed by that, moderate albeit active, of the two latter.

Therefore, conveyed by its phonation, its syntax, its semics, the Portuguese sentence follows a sinusoidal deployment, devoid of the joined insistence and the distance of a continuous swell. Its expansion is so sensitive that the very classic *Compêndio de gramática portuguesa* dedicates its entire first part to the complete sentence (with its accent, rhymes, numbers, etc.), then to the discourse (with its literary genres), before considering the status of isolated words.

Furthermore, this last passage comes after a long chapter entitled: 'Do latim ao português', which allows presenting the entire morphology as a suite of explicated derivations of Latin. The *Pequeno Larousse* gives for many words an etymology than its French counterpart does not provide. The Portuguese language is lived like a continuous 'lingua romana rustica'. Camões is positive. The exploits accomplished by Portugal are made more powerful that they are expressed in a language that, give one corruption or so, possesses the virtues of Latin: "na língua, na qual, quando imagina,/ Com pouca corrupção crê que é a Latina ». New dimension of Sebastianism. Particularly if we note the 'quando imagina'.

Why is Spanish so tinted with the Arab spirit, while Portuguese is not (the borrowing of a few words does not create a spirit)? There are many arguments. The fidelity of the colons of Lusitania to their mother language due to the fact that they were the furthest from Rome, a little like Romanians? The exacerbation of the western 'faustism' by the obsessing presence of the oceanic setting, which evacuated Islam? An impregnable coherence of the hypertrophic nasalization, therefore also of all the linguistic mechanism that it governed? Structural opposition to the Spanish neighbours, since Pessoa writes: "Somos ternos <tender> e pouco intensos, ao contrário dos espanhóis - nossos absolutos contrários -, que são apaixonados e frios (who are passionate and cold)"

8B. Cultural consonances

Such a party does not bring us to expect a sumptuous prose or a great skilful music, and a Portuguese Flaubert or Beethoven is hardly conceivable.

On the other hand, an intense popular poetry and music were continuously exuded. The 'fado', where the broken voice of Marceniero allies to the syncopations of the guitar, bears the

terrible name of “esfingico e fatal » is the portuguese ‘olhar’ (looking), warned us *Mensagem*. This goes back to the Galician-Portuguese troubadours, the relay being provided by the Renaissance with Camôes’ sonnets. The contrast of these *Sonetos* with those of Pétrarque, which they even follow in the order of rhymes, opposes the pitches and depressions of the waves of Italian on the one hand, and the horizontal and sinusoidal propagation of the Portuguese swell on the other. From the very first verses, there is a contrast between the almost chattering of “Voi ch'ascoltate in rime sparse il suono / Di quei sospiri (...) » and the throbbing, steady aspiration of “Enquanto quis Fortuna que tivesse / Esperança de algum contentamento (...) ».

The topology of the faraway-close gave birth to another great popular art, architecture. Eugenio d’Ors barely exaggerates when he declares that the only true ‘baroque’ is Portuguese. However, from 1500 and the Manueline era, gothic, although congenitally upward, distributed itself according to the horizontal oceanic tension, along decorative motifs tying knots and undulations of the waves, but particularly through the global structure where the rhetoric of surbased arches creates a space-time of the immanent transcendence, of the transcendent immanence. The undulating mosaics of the pavements continued the obsessing journey in urbanism. Then, on this triple foundation, which was faddist, Manueline and baroque, the scholarly poetry could in turn stretch its two conquests: Camôes and Pessoa.

Os Lusíadas is not read. The reader sails through this book. Amôes did not write them, he swam them. In summary, he held them close to him when he started celebrating the Lusitanians, the Lusiades, *Os Lusíadas*. All around, the epopee had become heroic-comical with Ariosto, Romanesque with il Tasso, and flowery with Ronsard. How was it possible to maintain the mythological spirit in 1572, at a time when Renaissance discovered the objective attitude of science? Particularly that this realist, who had lost an eye in his overseas expeditions, prided himself on the reality of the feats that he tells (façanhas) against the dreams of the ancients: ‘As verdadeiras vossas < façanhas > sao tamanhas, / Que excedem as sonhadas, fabulosas’. (Your true <feats> are so great that they exceed those that are dreamt, the fabulous ones). At this rate, one plays at Polybius, not at Homer or Virgil.

However, the epopee did take place. Because, due to unique circumstance, the places travelled (the ocean and its shares in expanses, islands, peninsulas and storm capes), the theme approached (the aspiration of the faraway-close, which erotically encircles the Mother-Land), the language structure (the horizontal transcendence of Portuguese), the general topology inherent to the epic (specifically horizontalising) coincide so closely that the real had the interiority of the imaginary, that history became mythology, that the operations of the actors were simultaneously those of the writer writing and of the reader murmuring his text. Let us re-read the four verses of the epigraph. Do they speak of Portuguese sailors marrying the movements of Neptune and Aeolus or of these other sailors that are the Portuguese speakers moving forth in the meanders of their nasalized vowels, in a succession of trochee, of spondee, of dactyls, of choriambes, of iambs: Os ven/tos bran/damen/te res/pira/vam?

Yet, must we enumerate so many diverse meters, and is Camôes not the most striking example of Poe’s theory in *The Rationale of Verse*? The problem would then not be so much that there is a fixed number of feet that the way in which, by groups of twos or threes (rarely four of five), their time is beaten equally if the accent is correctly placed, but also if one perceives that, by position and sometimes by sense, the syllables have a value that is almost double or triple to some others. In a way that the diction and the event swim together, from

stroke to stroke, in opening-closing, thrust-retraction, ringing-resonance, in a retroversive and proversive echo; in brief, that they navigate ‘on/das in/quie/tas ap/partan/do’, ‘ve/las cõnca/vas inchan/do’. Under the condition, of course, that the entire strophe should swim. The ABABABCC disposition also existed with il Tasso and Ariosto, but it finds its ultimate accomplishment in the Portuguese sinusoid.

This is how even the sky entered the oceanic mythology. When the gods of Camões cross the ether, they do so according to a horizontal and supple movement of convoluting squadron: ‘Pisan/do o cris/tali/no Céu/ fermo/so, / Vêm pe/la Vi/a Lác/tea jun/tamen/te’ (striding the beautiful crystalline sky, they go in concert through the Milky Way). The narrative ‘interest’ and the ‘truth’ of the characters become derisory. The questions of Voltaire (unfortunately without regret) and Chateaubriand (fortunately with palinode) only demonstrate that they did not know Portuguese.

Pessoa, who is almost a contemporary of Proust, and is so very Proustian, went on a journey that was even more perilous than Camões, that of the absolute alheação. Indeed, he signed Pessoa, Alberto Caerio, Ricardo Reis, Alvaro de Campos, and other ‘heterónimos’, whether it was the Sebastianist and futurist ‘eu’ (I) that published the *Mensagem* (Futurism, mirror image of Sebastianism, experienced a quick moment in Lisbon), or that the ‘subpersonalidades’ of this ‘ele mesmo’ (itself) activated a poetry that was antique pantheistic, pre-cultural, archaeological, latinisating, etc. Incidentally, the very society (always fake) game of comparisons was played, quoting ‘characters searching for authors’ of Pirandello, the identity crisis of Milosz and Ungaretti, the multiple instances of antique polytheism. It is advisable to take the poet seriously when he declares that ‘his motherland is the Portuguese language, and that ‘o bom português é várias pessoas’. With these speakers, even the sexual difference does not sharpen provocation, like in Italy, France, or Spain, but adjustment. In the Portuguese ‘toirada’, the bull is not killed, it is hugged. In the same way as the sail hugs the wind, and the hull holds the waves.

However, two reinforcing factors were essential to produce the extreme Camões that Pessoa aimed to be. Be called ‘Pessoa’: persona = mask = character. Not really having had a mother tongue; raised in South Africa, he perceived both English and Portuguese as second languages. A hysteric-neurasthenic predisposition: ‘Não sei se sou simplesmente histórico, se sou, mais propriamente, um histero-neurasténico’. A (platonic) homosexuality inviting to transgress his sex, or rather, because we are in the Portuguese sexual adjustment, to belong to both sexes while remaining in his: ‘Na mulher os fenómenos histericos rompem em ataques (...) Mas sou homem - e nos homens a histeria assume principalmente aspectos mentais.’

Let us enumerate a few ultimate questions. (1) Was there a great philosopher in this linguistic area? Aphoristic response: Yes, Pessoa, even if he puts the following declarations in Alberto Caerio’s mouth: ‘não ter filosofia nenhuma. Com filosofia não há árvores (with philosophy there are no trees): há ideias apenas’. (2) Was there, in the first half of the 20th century, a fundamental anthropologist more essential than Freud? Yes, Pessoa. (3) Finally, could another language pretend to the alheação, mixture of ‘strangeness’ and trouble (perturbação)? Yes, English, and this is perhaps why *The Rationale of Verse* elucidates Camões so well. Pessoa was also an English poet, at times Byronian, at times Shakespearian: ‘achou nos sonetos de Shakespeare uma complexidade que quis reproduzir numa adaptação moderna’.

In his 35 sonnets organised ABABCDCDEFEF/GG, like in Shakespeare's 154, we find a perfect definition of the faraway-close: 'Our soul *from* us is infinitely far'.

In painting, Vieira da Silva has depicted entire sailing cities, casting off in the gliding of values. Photography, which is also readily swarthy, confirms the valoristic desontology. Eliding motives on the head and feet, Jorge Molder's horizontal evanescence stretch the perceptive field into a limitless 'alheação'. What in Italy is called a short cut should be known here as a *stretching*.

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At the opposite of Spanish in Latin America, Portuguese did not accomplish the miracle of blending together a European civilisations and a powerful pre-Columbian civilisation. On the contrary, when its oceanic sinusoid encountered the black rhythmic (African and Caribbean), it gave birth to the dance of Brazil, this perception of life where bodies are simultaneously frenetic and undulatory breathing, where birth and death inter-breathe, one awaking and making the other tender, without bitterness or illusion. No longer do we find 'fadinge' or 'murmur vowels', the final 'ch' are 's', and vowels open up. The syntax is no longer involved. And the semantics is practiced as the 'danced' displacement of the designatum.

But if Portuguese and Brazilian speakers sometimes encounter great difficulties in understanding each other, as they almost speak two different languages, it is still Portuguese Camões and Pessoa who support Brazilian Haroldo de Campos when, under the form of 'concrete poetry' (very important in Latin America as the Aztec influence is stronger than that of Mallarmé), he obtains that death and birth should dance in the Brazilian way between the two poles of the 'se', reflexive pronoun and mentalist conditional conjunction, and the reiterative and nostalgic 're':

se / nasce / morre nasce / morre nasce morre / renasce remorre renasce / remorre renasce /
remorre / re / desnasce / desmorre desnasce / desmorre desnasce desmorre / nascemorrenasce /
morrenasce / morre / se

And it is without doubt in the swell of this Portuguese Brazilian speaker that European languages since Greece have encountered each other the most intimately as a polyglot intertext: polifluxbórboro polivozbárbaro polúphloisbos / polyfizyboisterous weitaufrauschend fluctissonante esse mar esse mar / esse mar esse martexto (mer-texte) por quem os signos dobram marujando (signs double, swaying like sailors) num estuário / de papel num mortuário num monstruário de papel múrmur-rumor-remurmurhante (...) escribalbuciendo (...) na primeira, segunda, terceira posição do amor'. Under the condition of being 'once again united to the sea': "Mais uma vez junto ao mar..."

Henri Van Lier

Translated by Paula Cook