

Painting the Nails with a Parisian Polish

Modern Dissemination and Central Redemption in the Poetry of Mário de Sá-Carneiro

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Keywords

Mário de Sá-Carneiro, Modernism, Fragmentation of the subject, Semiperiphery, Paris, Eiffel Tower.

Abstract

This study analyzes the ways in which the city of Paris contributes to the definition of a modern fragmented identity in the poetry of Mário de Sá-Carneiro. Sá-Carneiro's poetry demonstrates how the experience of the modern Parisian life leads to the fragmentation and dissolution of his poetic subject, at the same time that this dissolution in the city is the very condition for the subject's existence. Moreover this identity largely owes to the perspective of an individual who is a member of the semiperipheral Portuguese society. Ultimately this subject finds a form of redemption both from his ontological deferment and that semiperipheral condition in the utmost cosmopolitanism of Paris and, as happens with other avant-garde discourses, in the technical modernity of the French capital.

Palavras-chave

Mário de Sá-Carneiro, Modernismo, Fragmentação do sujeito, Semiperiferia, Paris, Torre Eiffel.

Resumo

Este estudo analisa de que forma a cidade de Paris contribui para a definição de uma identidade moderna fragmentada na poesia de Mário de Sá-Carneiro. A poesia de Sá-Carneiro demonstra como a experiência da vida moderna parisiense leva à fragmentação e à dissolução do sujeito poético, ao mesmo tempo que esta dissolução na cidade é a própria condição necessária à existência do sujeito. Esta identidade é devedora do ponto de vista de um indivíduo membro da sociedade semiperiférica portuguesa. Em última análise, o sujeito encontra a redenção tanto para o seu diferimento ontológico como para essa condição semiperiférica no cosmopolitismo absoluto de Paris e, tal como acontece com outros discursos vanguardistas, na modernidade técnica da capital francesa.

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A central figure in Portuguese literary Modernism, Mário de Sá-Carneiro was born in 1890 and committed suicide in Paris in April 1916. Along with Fernando Pessoa, Mário de Sá-Carneiro was one of the main figures of the magazine *Orpheu*, the central Modernist journal published in Lisbon in 1915, which caused public outrage in the Portuguese literary field and beyond. The period between October 1912, when Sá-Carneiro leaves for Paris, and his death, with intervals of time spent in Lisbon, corresponds to the development of an original collection of Modernist poetry that starts off with strong affinities with *fin-de-siècle* Symbolism and comes to encompass incursions into avant-garde literary experimentation.

Mário de Sá-Carneiro's works have often been read in highly mythical ways. This reality partly owes to the fact that so many elements of his texts parallel or coincide with aspects of his own biography, and namely that these overlaps include suicide itself, a topic addressed often times theatrically in his writings. To these more mythical interpretations of Sá-Carneiro's works have contributed the biographical insights provided by the collection of his letters to Fernando Pessoa, which are in themselves highly valuable Modernist textual constructions and a locus of literary experimentation.¹ By focusing on Sá-Carneiro's biography, these approaches have only partially contributed to the understanding of why and how Paris is a protagonist in Sá-Carneiro's poetry and moreover how the city is central in the very definition of Sá-Carneiro's literary modernity.

Adopting a perspective that rejects calling to discussion Mário de Sá-Carneiro's life or death, this article studies the ways in which the city of Paris permeates Mário de Sá-Carneiro's poetry and decisively contributes to the definition of a modern fragmented identity, one which often times is presented as disseminated in the city. Sá-Carneiro's poetry evidences a poetic subject whose experience of the Parisian life leads to his fragmentation and dissolution in the city,

¹ The central characteristics of a veritable Sá-Carneiro "myth," as Fernando Cabral Martins has synthesized, include "the reference to Pessoa as a major poet, and a relation between [Sá-Carneiro's] prophecy-poems and his suicide" ["Os dados centrais do mito estão aqui: a referência a Pessoa como poeta maior e a relação entre os poemas-profecias e o suicídio"] (Martins, 1994: 16). Fernando Cabral Martins demonstrates how Mário de Sá-Carneiro evolved from a figure of public scandal early after the publication of *Orpheu* – more so than Fernando Pessoa –, to that of a literary icon immediately after his suicide in 26 April 1916. In fact Mário de Sá-Carneiro became emblematic for literary groups as diverse, and frequently opposed in their literary views, as the first Modernists, the writers of the second Modernism, associated with the journal *presença*, Neo-realists or Surrealists, all authors who chose to focus on specific aspects of his work and life, and oftentimes on his death (Martins, 1994: 39; see also Martinho, 1989). The fact that the author's suicide occurred in Paris directly influenced a tradition of highlighting Sá-Carneiro's biography to read his works and vice-versa. This is visible, for example, in the early obituaries of May 1916, which attribute a hypothetical moral dissolution and the death of Mário de Sá-Carneiro to the Parisian spleen (*apud* Martins, 1994: 21), or in the imagery of an almost *poète maudit* that developed throughout the twentieth century.

at the same time that this dissolution is the very condition for the subject's existence. Moreover this identity results largely from the perspective of an individual who is a member of the semiperipheral Portuguese society and who ultimately finds a redemption to that semiperipheral condition in the utmost cosmopolitanism of Paris and, as happened with other avant-garde discourses, in the technical modernity of the French capital.

At a level that strictly speaking does not pertain to the analysis of the author's poetic creations, we should note Sá-Carneiro's desire to expose and immerse himself in the city and its bourgeois atmosphere. In fact it is worth pointing out, for example, that a large part of Sá-Carneiro's letters to Fernando Pessoa were written in sheets bearing the letterhead of the Parisian cafés and hotels where the author circulated. At another level of understanding, that already has implications on the universe defined in his texts, we should also point out that after Sá-Carneiro's arrival to Paris most of his poems bear an explicit reference to the location where they were written – Paris – a type of information that was not generalized in his earlier poems.

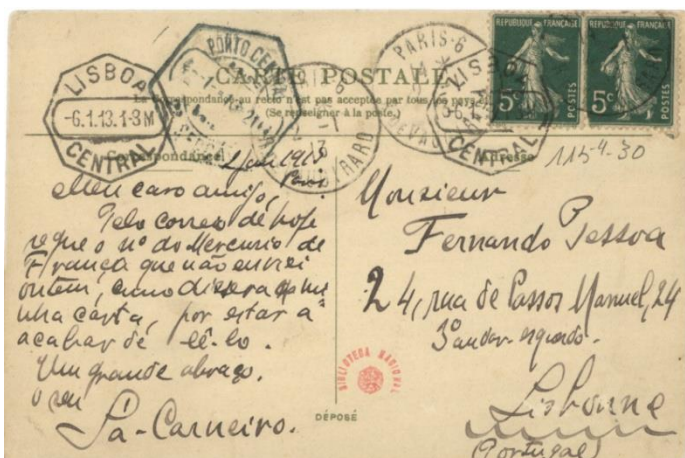


Fig. 1. BNP/E3, 115⁴-30^v.



Fig. 2. BNP/E3, 115⁴-30^v.



Fig. 3. BNP/E3, 1154-19r.



Fig. 4. BNP/E3, 1155-16r.

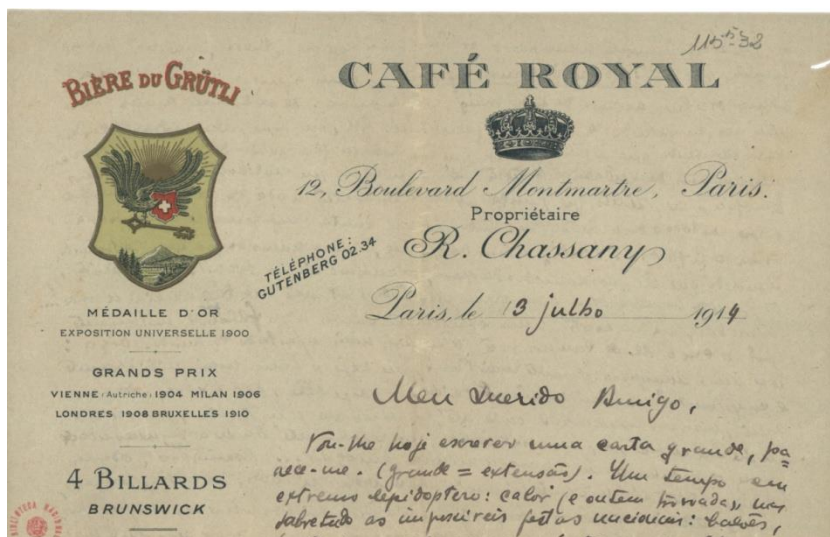


Fig. 5. BNP/E3, 1155-32r.

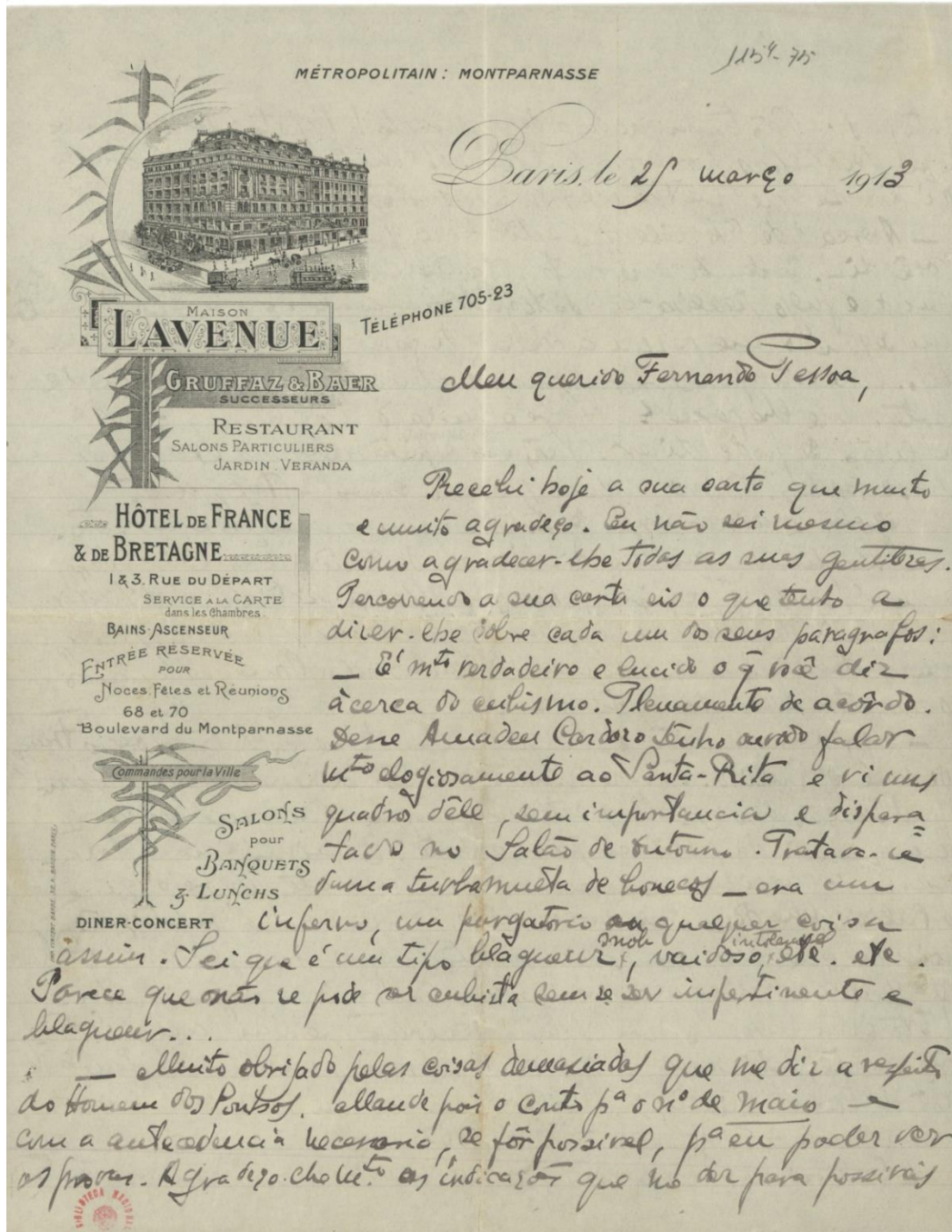


Fig. 6. BNP/E3, 115^a-75^a.

More important, however, with regard to the understanding of Sá-Carneiro's literature, is an analysis of how the crucial themes of identity fragmentation and dissemination are especially evident in his depiction of the movements and interactions of his poetic subject in the French capital. The common relation between these feelings and the space of the city has already been pointed out by Malcolm Bradbury, who tells us, in his study "The Cities of Modernism," that the "modern artist [has] ... been caught up in the spirit of the modern city, which is itself the spirit of a modern technological society" (Bradbury,

1991: 97). Furthermore, Bradbury suggests that the modernist themes of “disconnection and loss” and “artistic emancipation” are carried mostly “in the glare and existential exposure of the city” (101).

In the poetry of Mário de Sá-Carneiro, Paris, a central capital in European Modernism, is simultaneously a symbol of a desired modern life and a direct agent in a daily experience of existential dissolution. One of the roles of Paris in the poetry of Mário de Sá-Carneiro is a Modernist one, whereby the city’s paradigmatic technical modernity is an agent of fragmentation and dispersion of the poetic subject, who constantly mirrors himself in the urban landscape, as can be seen in many of his poems. “Dispersão” [“Dispersion”], written in May 1913 when the poet is already living in Paris, to where he had moved in the previous year in order to study Law, in fact provides the title for Mário de Sá-Carneiro’s first volume of poetry, *Dispersão. 12 Poesias* [*Dispersion. 12 Poems*], published later that same year.² The composition consists of twenty-two quartets and a final couplet, written in a traditional Portuguese heptasyllabic meter, and addresses the feelings or the experiences of dispersion, labyrinth, nostalgia, loss and madness, which are tightly articulated with a representation of a modernized and bourgeois Paris.

The poetic subject tells us from the very beginning that he is lost inside himself since he himself was a labyrinth [“Perdi-me dentro de mim | Porque eu era labirinto”] (23)³ and that the feeling of identity is dependent on the nostalgia of a past in which he is trapped: “I have no tomorrow nor today” [“Não tenho amanhã nem hoje”] (23). The image of the Sunday in Paris serves here mostly as a contrasting force for the subject’s present state, being a symbol of the comforts of the bourgeois lifestyle: “The Sunday in Paris | Reminds me of the lost one | Who felt, touched, | The Sundays in Paris” [“O Domingo de Paris | Lembra-me o desaparecido | Que sentia comovido | Os domingos de Paris”] (23). The title, and the very mention of the act of remembering, may be read as an allusion to Guy de Maupassant’s *Les Dimanches d’un bourgeois de Paris*. However we can read the passage as a commentary on the existential gap felt by an individual split into two: the subject that remembers and the one who is remembered, the latter being a subject who was still able to feel touched by the idealization of the Parisian bourgeois living, longing for an integration in it, “Because a Sunday is family, | Is

² The first edition of *Dispersão* is printed in 26 November 1913, in Lisbon. See the chronology of Mário de Sá-Carneiro’s works organized by Fernando Cabral Martins, *apud* Sá-Carneiro (2010: 661-666).

³ With the exception of the poem “Manucure” all translations of Mário de Sá-Carneiro’s works included in this study are mine, and in them I am intentionally very literal. The page numbers that accompany all quotations refer to the Portuguese originals found on the collection of Sá-Carneiro’s writings *Verso e Prosa* (Sá-Carneiro, 2010), edited by Fernando Cabral Martins. Given the dearth of Sá-Carneiro’s poetry available in English, I note here that Ted Hughes translated more freely three poems by Sá-Carneiro, in collaboration with Helder and Suzette Macedo; these are available in *Ted Hughes – Selected Translations* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008: 19-22).

well-being, simplicity | And those who look at beauty | Have no well-being nor family” [“Porque um domingo é família, | É bem-estar, é singeleza, | E os que olham a beleza | Não têm bem-estar nem família”] (23). This gap between the past with a hope never to be fulfilled and a skeptical present is what in fact prevents the apparent circularity of the quartet, emphasized by an almost exact repetition in the first and fourth lines and consequent enclosed rhyme. One of the main contrasts in the poem is established between a past hope and a present skepticism, and the circular references, expressive for highlighting the spiraling centrality of the topic, by bordering the redundant (*family – well-being | well-being – family*) point to that which was never attained. At the same time, they emphasize a nostalgic feeling, a pain for not being able to return to a previous condition, that of accessing the apparent tranquility of the bourgeois life, of which the poetic subject is now alienated.

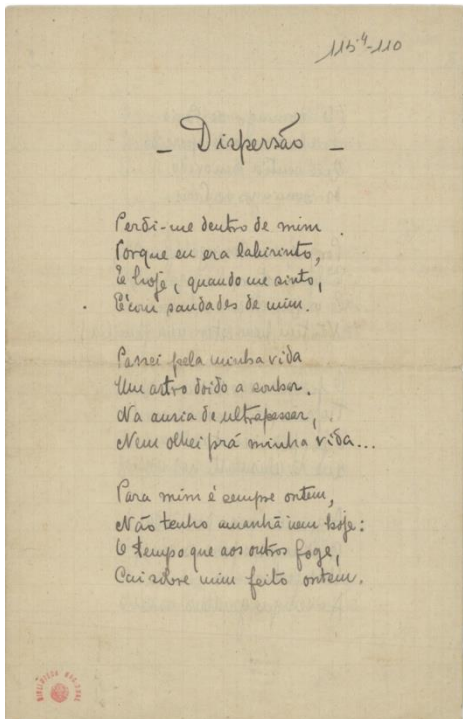


Fig. 7. BNP/E3, 115^v-110^r. “Dispersão” (first page).

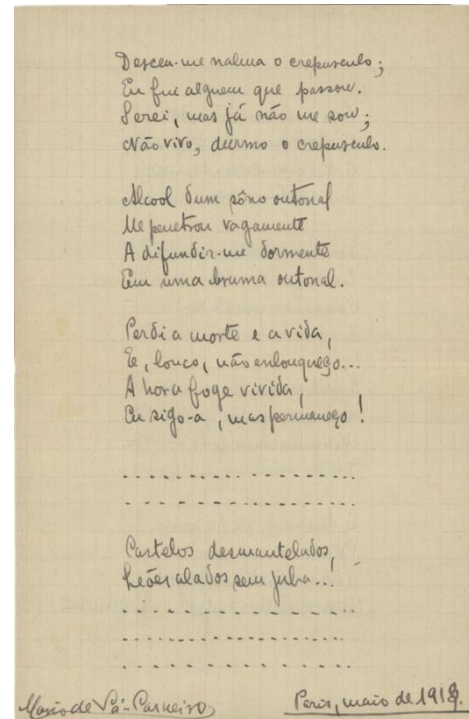


Fig. 8. BNP/E3, 115^v-111^v. “Dispersão” (last page).

Walter Benjamin’s characterization of the Baudelairian flâneur, someone for whom “Paris becomes the subject of lyric poetry” (Benjamin, 2006: 40), and whose way of life is that of an alienated man, uncertain of his social and economic position in a new capitalist order and urban space, helps us understand the language of Sá-Carneiro and his poetic subject’s actions in a Parisian atmosphere. The flâneur exalts the atmosphere of the big city, its modernity materialized in the diversity and the structural developments, and denounces the desolation of the life of its dwellers, while he seeks “refuge [...] among the masses of the big city” (Benjamin, 2006: 96). Baudelaire himself “loved solitude, but he wanted it in a

crowd" (Benjamin, 2006: 81), stated Benjamin, to whom the flâneur is "the man of the crowd" (Benjamin, 2006: 79), someone indeed "abandoned in the crowd," the latter deemed by the German philosopher as a "new subject in lyric poetry" as well (Benjamin, 2006: 90).

As happens with the Baudelairian flâneur, the subject of Sá-Carneiro's poetry shares the attraction to the city and a "joy of watching" which "prevails over all" (Benjamin, 2006: 98). He rests his gaze on the city of Paris, inheriting this strategy from Baudelaire and the two generations of authors between them. Like Baudelaire, Mário de Sá-Carneiro offers us a subject whose social and economic status is by no means assured, but rather in decay, and who takes to the streets of Paris to find meaning in the modern urban experience. However, Sá-Carneiro's poetic subject sharply diverges from the Baudelairian flâneur in the sense that the subject lacks the sociological interest of representing the social fringes and chooses to display an alienating effect of the modern urban experience by focusing almost exclusively on the fragmentation and dissolution of the self in the city. Contrary to Baudelaire, Sá-Carneiro does not portray the factory worker, the criminal, the prostitute, the lesbian, or for that matter any woman with a higher degree of agency, with the exception of an always-symbolic dancer. The most clearly defined figure in his poetry, even in its very rupture, is always the poetic subject himself, early on portrayed sometimes as a foreign fallen dandy who is focused on his own fall, and later on as a nostalgic poet who lingers in the cafés, and inherently in both situations as a marginal to the French bourgeois social circles.

Contributing to a notion of fragmentation and dispersion of this poetic subject is the image of decay, and there are in this poetry multiple passages associated with the subject's rise and fall. Still in the poem "Dispersão" ["Dispersion"] the image of a "great golden bird" who "flapped its wings towards the skies" stands out, in an allusion to an Icarus who did not burn his wings for flying too close to the Sun but rather chose to close them as soon as he "took the skies" ["A grande ave dourada | Bateu as asas para os céus | Mas fechou-as saciada | Ao ver que ganhava os céus"] (24).⁴ The poem moves considerably beyond the

⁴ The *topoi* of a rise and a fall have often been characterized as Sá-Carneiro's leitmotifs. See namely Fernando Cabral Martins (1994; particularly the section titled "A alegoria da queda," pp. 294-298), Adolfo Casais Monteiro (1972; particularly pp. 118-125), or David Mourão-Ferreira (1981). David Mourão-Ferreira analyzes the "archetypal figure of Icarus" ["figura arquetípica de Ícaro"] (1981: 131) as a main *topos* of Sá-Carneiro's poetry, but also associates this mythical reference to the poet himself, in a framework in which Icarus stands for Sá-Carneiro and Daedalus for Fernando Pessoa, respectively a disciple dazzled with life and beauty and a mentor trapped in his labyrinthine creations: "Under the impetuous torrential existence of Sá-Carneiro, of all of his work, hovers, in fact, the archetypal figure of Icarus: 'I passed through my life | as a dreaming mad star. | In the anxiety to overcome | I did not even notice my life.' These lines belong to the poem 'Dispersão,' to the first of the poems he wrote on that May 1, 1913" ["Sob a torrente impetuosa de toda a existência de Sá-Carneiro, de toda a sua obra, ondula, com efeito, a figura arquetípica de Ícaro: 'Passei pela minha vida | Um astro doido a sonhar. | Na ânsia de ultrapassar | Nem dei pela minha vida'.

somewhat commonplace and nostalgic reference to a longing for “the dreams not dreamt” [“os sonhos que não sonhei”] (24), which is more in line with the Portuguese Saudosista aesthetics, largely based on a messianic attitude understood arguably to represent the Portuguese soul. In what is an essential characteristic of Mário de Sá-Carneiro’s modernity, the poem goes well beyond the presentation of a longing subject, to display – to use the image of the title of the poem – a dispersed identity, as a result of a process to which Paris contributes directly. The subject states: “I don’t feel the space that I contain | Nor the lines that I project: | If I look at myself in the mirror, I err | I do not find myself in that which I project” [“Não sinto o espaço que encerro | Nem as linhas em que me projecto: | Se me olho a um espelho, erro – | Não me acho no que me projecto”] (24). The individual who does not feel the space he delimitates is one who feels his identity shattered and can only be perceived in a paradigm not dependent on his own physical boundaries. Essentially, the mirror does not return to the subject any stable or recognizable notion of identity.

In this loss of a unitary and recognizable identity, no longer found in the mirror, Paris plays a primordial role. The city is in fact the main mirror of Mário de Sá-Carneiro’s poetic subject’s fragmentation, both literally and metaphorically. Walter Benjamin provides us with an insight that helps understand how this role of the city comes about since, according to Benjamin, Paris was itself a city in the mirror (“Paris, die Stadt im Spiegel”):

Paris is the city of mirrors. The asphalt of its roads is as smooth as a mirror. All the bistros are fronted by glassed-in rooms: in them women can see themselves more readily than anywhere else. The beauty of the Parisian woman has emerged from these mirrors. Before any man catches sight of her, ten mirrors have already put her to the test. A surplus of mirrors also surrounds the man, especially in the café (to make it brighter inside and to

Pertencem estes versos ao poema *Dispersão*, ao primeiro dos poemas que escreveu naquele dia 1 de Maio de 1913”] (1981: 132). Mourão-Ferreira recalls Urbano Tavares Rodrigues’s emphasis on the more confessional and nihilistic tone of Sá-Carneiro’s later poems, a tendency which, according to Mourão-Ferreira, illustrates the moment of Icarus’s fall (133), even if the very first book of poems seems to evidence this same dichotomy (rise | fall) explored by the critic, as noted by the mention to the poem “Dispersão.” Although I am not addressing here the productivity and limitations of Mourão-Ferreira’s metaphorical framework for understanding the literary relationship between Pessoa and Sá-Carneiro, it is noteworthy that the very poetic subject of “Dispersão” states that he himself “was a labyrinth” [“eu era labirinto”] (23) – we could add *as well*, given Mourão-Ferreira’s use of that image with regard specifically to Pessoa, not Sá-Carneiro. On the other hand, even if a full discussion of the topic does not fit here, it is worth pointing out that the view of Sá-Carneiro as a disciple of Pessoa that results from the metaphoric framework Icarus | Daedalus is arguably not totally faithful to the type of literary relation Mário de Sá-Carneiro’s letters demonstrate. Especially in the first years, we can observe Sá-Carneiro’s literary considerations being offered to Pessoa as those made by a peer, and not so much by a disciple, and that he provides to Pessoa both valuable literary insights and sharp literary feedback, which in themselves must have fostered the dialogue between the poets.

lend a pleasant sense of space to all the tiny nests and hutches into which Parisian bars are divided). Mirrors are the spiritual element of this city, her insignia, into which the emblems of all the schools of poets have always inscribed themselves. [...] [The Seine] is Paris's great and ever watchful mirror. Day in and day out Paris throws its buildings and cloud dreams as images into this river. The river accepts this sacrifice graciously and breaks them into a thousand pieces as a sign of its favor.

(Benjamin, 1972: 358-359)⁵

As Benjamin suggests, the mirror and other smooth and reflecting surfaces are a key element in the modern structures of bourgeois Paris, and, in a multiplication effect, perpetuate the lights of the city, beyond that light of knowledge for which it gained its title of *city of lights*. Equally relevant is Benjamin's insight of surfaces that both reflect the city and its residents and fragment them thereby generating a feeling of loss, as happens with the structures of the city treated by the Seine like offerings for a sacrifice. This view of modernity implies a process of multiplication of the being's representation, a multiplicity of identities in their surface, and their very fragmentation in the multiple panes, regardless of how stable (the asphalt or the shop windows) or undulating (the Seine) they may be. It is a feeling of loss that results from this multiplication and fragmentation, the same that we can find in Mário de Sá-Carneiro's "Dispersão," in which the mirror of the Parisian modern experience, both literally and symbolically, offers only an unrecognizable image to the self.

Most remarkably, Mário de Sá-Carneiro shares Walter Benjamin's insight about the relation of the individual with the modernity of the Parisian mirrors and reflections, which are associated with a feeling of fragmentation, especially with regard to the space of the Parisian café. This can be seen, for example, in "Manucure," a long poem largely influenced by avant-garde experimentation and published for the first time in the second issue of *Orpheu*, in 1915 (and fourteen years before Benjamin's brief article). In it, the worlds of technical, commercial, industrial, and aesthetic modernities are summoned to a café to saturate a scene with the two central figures multiplied in mirrors and other panes. The two figures are those of a foreigner reading the *Matin* and the poetic subject painting his fingernails with Parisian nail polish, in itself a representation of this dandy's desire to immerse himself in Parisian sophistication:

And with this feeling of polishing my fingernails,⁶
Painting them with Parisian lacquer,

⁵ The article was first published by Walter Benjamin in *Vogue* (30 January, 1929) and is included in *Denkbilder*. I thank Chantal Wright for the translation of this passage from the German original, in *Gesammelte Schriften* IV.I. A slightly different version of this passage is included in the manuscripts edited in *The Arcades Project* (Transl. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, prepared on the basis of the German volume edited by Rolf Tiedemann. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999, pp. 876-877).

I become more and more moved to compassion
 Till I cry out for Me...
 A thousand colors in the Air, a thousand throbbing vibrations,
 Deflected⁷ misty planes
 Drop down sinuously, shifting streaks, flexing discs
 Come tenuously, drawing up in me
 All the tenderness I could have lived,
 All the grandeur I could have sensed,
 All the *mise-en-scene* I ever Was...
 This is like the weak obsession
 Of a smile reflected in empty mirrors
 Focusing on me, bit by bit...

[E eu sempre na sensação de polir as minhas unhas
 E de as pintar com um verniz parisiense,
 Vou-me mais e mais enternecendo
 Até chorar por Mim...
 Mil cores no Ar, mil vibrações latejantes,
 Brumosos planos desviados
 Abatendo flechas, listas volúveis, discos flexíveis,
 Chegam tenuemente a perfilar-me
 Toda a ternura que eu pudera ter vivido,
 Toda a grandeza que eu pudera ter sentido,
 Todos os cenários que entretanto Fui...
 Eis como, pouco a pouco, se me foca
 A obsessão débil dum sorriso
 Que espelhos vagos me reflectiram...]

(41-42)

For Mário de Sá-Carneiro, Paris is the continuous reflection of a desired life that is never accomplished and whose lack of fulfillment, in a modern effect, is mirrored everywhere. In face of that void, it is identity itself that is shattered, as “a smile reflected in empty mirrors.” And beyond the mirror, that reflection of a fragmentation can also be found in the “thousand colors in the Air,” the “thousand throbbing vibrations,” and in the “crystalline quiver” which the reader can almost envision happening at the moment the subject becomes conscious of that loss. Moreover this identity is fragmented by the multiple reflections conjured in one single space – the Café and its surroundings – at the macro and micro levels:

⁶ With regard to the poem “Manucure,” and despite the indication according to which it is “Under continual revision,” I use the good translation of the poem available in the website <<http://sa-carneiro.blogspot.com/>>, whose author is not indicated and, regardless of my efforts, I could not identify. As with all other quotations of Sá-Carneiro’s poems, the page numbers indicated refer to the Portuguese original found on the collection of Sá-Carneiro’s writings *Verso e Prosa* (Sá-Carneiro, 2010), edited by Fernando Cabral Martins.

⁷ I change the original translation in this line, which reads “Distant misty planes,” since “Deflected” is more faithful to what I consider to be an attempted Cubist imagery of the poem.

Now, from the long polished glass that shows the street,
 Come theories of hyaline vertices
 Pulsing crystallizations, misty, diffuse,
 Like sunbolts they pierce the broad pane,
 Dancing in the space they tint with fantasy,
 Knots, italics, arrows, wings, – in multicolor dust –.

APOTHEOSIS⁸

[... Dos longos vidros polidos que deitam sobre a rua,
 Agora, chegam teorias de vértices hialinos
 A latejar cristalizações nevoadas e difusas.
 Como um raio de sol atravessa a vitrina maior,
 Bailam no espaço a tingi-lo em fantasias,
 Laços, grifos, setas, ases – na poeira multicolor –.

APOTEOSE.]

(45)

Though at first glance the arrival of this “apotheosis” may perhaps seem arbitrary, it arises from the processes of reflection, fragmentation, and ultimately refraction, both of the light and the individual, since “*It’s in the air that everything undulates! It’s there that everything exists!*” [“*É no ar que ondeia tudo! É lá que tudo existe!...*”] (45). Stated in a calligrammatic line that displays an undulating text, the passage embodies the very airwaves it alludes to and therefore also calls to the text the universe of the technological development of the radio, which we address ahead.

Beyond the point of a fragmentation displayed in the mirror, and metaphorically materialized in the multiplicity of reflecting surfaces, Mário de Sá-Carneiro also shows us a subject in complete dispersion and dissemination in the city, both in its signs of development and historical elements. In the poem “Alcohol,” for example, we see that immersion in history, with the subject’s movements in a city represented by the imposing references to “Guillotines, metal bullets, and castles | [which] Slide far away in procession,” a space where he is circled “by yellow twilights, | bitten, sickly in their purple” [“Guilhotinas, pelouros e castelos | Resvalam longemente em procissão | Volteiam-me crepúsculos amarelos, | Mordidos, doentios de roxidão”] (20). The condition for the process of integration in the city, represented by its history and development, however, is the dissolution of the individual: “In the air from afar I breathe myself, | I take part in the light that lights me; | I wish to collect myself, and entirely dissipate” [“Respiro-me no ar que ao longe vem, | Da luz que me ilumina participo; | Quero reunir-me, e todo me dissipo”] (20).

This process of dissemination and assimilation in the city is seen in the poem “Our Lady of Paris” (56-57), dated “Paris 1913 – June 15,” which Fernando Cabral

⁸ I change slightly the translation, in which the first line quoted here is translated as “Now, from the long polished glass falling to the street,” and I capitalize “Knots” on the sixth line.

Martins has considered mostly a Symbolist exercise due to its melding of sensorial experiences in synesthetic images (1994: 277). The poem presents us a poetic subject trapped by “Lists of sounds advancing against” him “In light,” and he temporarily finds relief in “An ocean scent [...] | A faraway melody | That longs for the Sea...” [“Listas de sons avançam para mim (...) | Em luz” (...) “Um cheiro a maresia | Vem-me refrescar, | Longínqua melodia | Toda saudosa a Mar...”] (56). In this contrast between a Paris that is excessively stimulating in its sound and light, in which the subject is immersed, and more Southern latitudes that represent the being through hypallages, for a short while the “Myrtles and tamarinds | Perfume the distance,” but the Parisian experience becomes the dominant one [“Mirtos e tamarindos | odoram a lonjura”] (56). The fusion of sensorial perceptions mentioned by Cabral Martins is visible throughout the whole poem, including the above-mentioned allusions to spaces outside Paris, but it is precisely the ultimate weaving together of the individual and the city that makes the Parisian space become the prevailing one. A preliminary step is the arrival of the night, which comes “bringing down cathedrals” [“E a noite cresce agora a desabar catedrais...”] (56). The subject tells us that he finds his “feelings draining themselves” [“Os meus sentidos a escoarem-se...”] (56) as we see him incorporating himself into the cathedral, through the representation of a figure that dissolves among the elements of the building.

In the poem “Sawdust” [“Serradura”], dated “Paris, September 1915,” we find the poetic subject’s soul already “dissolved calmly” while it “goes to Cafés, asks for a bock, | Reads the ‘Matin’ as a punishment” [“a minh’ Alma (...) Espapaçou-se de calma (...) Vai aos Cafés, pede um bock, | Lê o ‘Matin’ de castigo”] (100). The descriptor “dissolved calmly” is particularly expressive as it synthesizes the two main axioms of the relation of Mário de Sá-Carneiro’s poetic subject with Paris: the Parisian urban experience leads to the dissolution of identity, and the dissolution of identity in the French capital is the condition for the subject’s very existence. In the same poem, after describing the decay of his soul, visible also in the fact that it “already drinks wine | which it never used to do | and smokes its cigarette,” the poetic subject considers that a redemption for his identity may in fact be to become insane [“O raio já bebe vinho, | Coisa que nunca fazia, | E fuma o seu cigarrinho”] (100-101). However, such is the dissemination of the subject in the modern city, he makes an ultimate decision with regard to his soul, that may prevent that insane ending: “I will leave it – determined – | In the bathroom of a Café, | Like a ring that was forgotten. | It’s a more raffiné end” [“Vou deixá-la – decidido – | No lavabo dum Café, | Como um anel esquecido. | É um fim mais raffiné”] (101). The poem “Sawdust” therefore implies that this ending for the poetic subject’s soul might be a more refined one than the public displays of insanity proposed as alternatives. Equally refined, to translate the French word used in that poem, is another possibility of self-demise in Paris, that

we see the subject theatrically considering for himself in another text: “Fair enough. A hospital room – hygienic, all white, modern and tranquil; | Preferably in Paris – for the epitaph’s sake... | In twenty years maybe my literature will be understood – | And besides being crazy in Paris, looks good, has a certain style...” [“Justo. Um quarto de hospital – higiênico, todo branco, moderno e tranquilo; | Em Paris, é preferível – por causa da legenda... | Daqui a vinte anos a minha literatura talvez se entenda – | E depois estar maluquinho em Paris, fica bem, tem certo estilo...”] (113). It should be emphasized that the subject considers this possibility of identity dissipation and self-demise to be more dignified essentially because it may happen in the French capital.

In my view, a key to understanding Mário de Sá-Carneiro’s poetic subject’s desire for his actions and even his own dispersion in a great European capital lies partly in the idea that, as Malcolm Bradbury states, the “place of art’s very making can become an ideal distant city, where the creator counts, or the chaos is fruitful, the *Weltgeist* flows” (101). At the same time, this desire to create and disseminate in the French capital also owes to the Portuguese economic and social underdevelopment of the time, and to an awareness of that status by Sá-Carneiro, which directly influence the author’s identitarian discourse.

The disparate degrees of modernization of the capitals Lisbon and Paris, particularly in the early twentieth century, play an important role in that desire, and since the nineteenth century Paris was seen as the main cultural center for the Portuguese creators who desired an immersion in a cosmopolitan atmosphere. Pamela Bacarisse has described Mário de Sá-Carneiro’s cosmopolitan spirit as one that was naturally attracted by the city of Paris, in an interest that was also shared by his circle of fellow Portuguese writers (Bacarisse, 1984: 152). Sá-Carneiro’s cosmopolitanism, as Bacarisse points out, was characterized by “three basic temperamental needs: for the distant, for the different, and for the ultra-fashionable. [...] The familiar, the everyday, the pedestrian, are all *lepidóptero*⁹ and

⁹ Literally, from the animal order of the *lepidoptera*, which includes butterflies or moths. In the first years of the letters to Fernando Pessoa, we see the author often using the term metaphorically to refer to what he considered a small-minded literary field and society in Lisbon. In a letter to Fernando Pessoa of July 1914 in which he uses that word, Sá-Carneiro illustrates this rejection somewhat humorously, by stating that he had almost felt as though he were in Lisbon, given the Parisian Summer and festivities: “A weather *lepidoptero* in extreme: hot (and thunder yesterday), but mostly unbearable because of the national celebrations: balloons, dances, guitars – like there, exactly. Crossing Mazarine Street yesterday, Carlos Franco and I felt a chill, turned semi-mad, since we saw ourselves all of a sudden in Bairro Alto [a traditional neighborhood in Lisbon]. However, by focusing our spirit we concluded that it was our mistake and we calmed down only because it wasn’t *fado* that the guitars were playing” [“Um tempo em extremo lepidoptero: calor (e ontem trovoadas), mas sobretudo as impossíveis festas nacionais: balões, bailaricos, guitarras – como aí, tal e qual. Atravessando a rua Mazarine ontem eu e o Carlos Franco ficamos arripiados, semi-loucos pois vimo-nos de subitito em pleno Bairro Alto. Simplesmente, concentrando melhor o nosso espirito, concluimos o nosso erro e sossegámos só porque não era o fado o que as guitarras

unsatisfactory” (1984: 154). However, this interest in the French capital and the rejection of the Portuguese context, Bacarisse notes, was criticized by Fernando Pessoa: “To be in with new currents, to have *Zeitgeist*, to be modern and adventurous was, to Sá-Carneiro, to be *européu*, a word he uses frequently in his correspondence as well as in his prose and poetry. And Europe, of course, excluded Portugal. Pessoa called this attitude *provincianismo*, and [...] saw it as a defect in his friend” (1984: 151).¹⁰ Bacarisse also states, however, that “Sá-Carneiro’s *provincianismo* reveals a real need to be a part of fashion. His personality

raspavam...”] (I am keeping the original spelling of the manuscript 115⁵-32^r at the Biblioteca Nacional de Lisboa). For a more accessible source, see *Cartas de Mário de Sá-Carneiro a Fernando Pessoa*. Ed. Manuela Parreira da Silva. Lisbon: Assírio & Alvim, 2001. 122-123.

¹⁰ A discussion about the relation between the authors of the *Orpheu* generation and Europe would require a space not available in this article. However, with regard to this criticism of provincialism (“provincianismo”), it should be noted that both Mário de Sá-Carneiro and Fernando Pessoa considered the title *Europa* for a magazine planned before *Orpheu*. The projects and notes about the magazine written by Fernando Pessoa are available in the volume *Sensacionismo e outros ismos*, edited by Jerónimo Pizarro (see especially Pessoa: 2009: 24 to 37, which includes the editor’s note). Not by chance the project of *Europa* followed that of the journal *Lusitania* (a synonym for *Portugal*), a change of titles that represents an evolution in the journals’ aims. With regard to *Europa*, a project that was the object of epistolary dialogue between Pessoa and Sá-Carneiro, who was already in Paris, Pizarro notes that the magazine, “as the very title suggests, aimed to Europeanize Portugal” [“como o próprio título o sugere, pretendia a europeização de Portugal”] (*apud* Pessoa, 2009: 24). It should be noted here that Fernando Pessoa shows a certain ambiguity with regard to this potential goal. Titling the magazine *Europa* expresses the desire to engage a wider cultural field than the no-longer sufficient Portuguese one, and in fact Pessoa stated that it was “necessary to have [...], besides culture, a notion of the *international field* [...] not to have the soul (even if obscurely) limited by nationality. Culture is not enough. It is necessary to have a soul in Europe” [“é preciso ter (...), além de cultura, uma noção do *meio internacional* (...) não ter a alma (ainda que obscuramente) limitada pela nacionalidade. Cultura não basta. É preciso ter a alma na Europa”] (2009: 29; italics in original). At the time same Pessoa did not accept that the best creations by Portuguese authors were in any way of lesser quality than the ones by authors from other countries. In that sense, *Europa* would have been a space of cultural exchange, where translations of foreign works into Portuguese could be included, and translations of Portuguese works would be made available to foreigners, as described in the following personal note by Pessoa: “Publication of Portuguese works that may valorize us abroad. [...] The translations would be made into all possible languages; they would be made first into French and English; into Spanish, Italian and German; and subsequently into Russian, Hungarian and Scandinavian languages. There could be translations, finally, into Japanese, given the influence European works have in Japan. [...] And, in a reverse manner, a Europeanization of the country would be attained through the publication of the best works abroad, especially with the creation of a balanced state of the aesthetic sense and the culture in mind” [“Publicação de obras portuguesas que possam valorizar-nos no estrangeiro. (...) As traduções seriam para todas as linguas possíveis; começariam a ser para francez e ingles; seriam para hespanhol, italiano e alemão; a seguir para russo, hungaro e as linguas escandinavas. Poderia haver traducções, finalmente, para japonez, dada a influencia que obras europeas teem no Japão. (...) E, agindo ao contrario, far-se-hia a europeização do paiz mediante a publicação do melhor que houvesse no estrangeiro, tendo em vista especialmente a criação do estado equilibrado do senso esthetico e da cultura”] (Pessoa: 2009, 32).

was such that he had to be at the centre of things and the most typical features of the Parisian life at that time involved all the aspects of life that he held most dear" (1984: 156). Some elements of this life, as Bacarisse illustrates, are particularly associated with cultural production, such as the most innovative theatre and dance shows.

In my view, however, the framework of an alleged *provincianismo* of Mário de Sá-Carneiro, echoing Fernando Pessoa, used to characterize Sá-Carneiro's appeal for Paris and the refusal of what he saw as the underdevelopment of his country or the small-mindedness of Lisboners bears a moral and somewhat nationalistic judgment that does not assist us sufficiently in understanding what is at stake in the author's attraction for the paradigmatic modernity of Paris and, much more importantly, what is at stake in the Parisian experience of his poetic subject.

A synthesis of the asymmetries between Portugal and other European nations that may help us better understand Mário de Sá-Carneiro's poetry is provided by sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos, when he states that since the seventeenth century Portugal has been "a semiperipheral country in the modern capitalist world system" (Santos, 2002: 9).¹¹ In his essay "Between Prospero and Caliban: Colonialism, Postcolonialism and Inter-Identity," Sousa Santos defines the position of Portugal in the correlation of power between colonial nations. This is a long-lasting position (which in fact continues to have strong resonances in the current status of Portugal in the European Union), and contributes to the national identity by influencing the self-identity of Portuguese citizens as well as their worldviews:

Although this condition has evolved across centuries, it has kept its basic features: an intermediate economic development and a position of intermediation between the center and the periphery of the world economy; a state which, being both product and producer of that intermediate position, never assumed fully the characteristics of the modern state of the core countries, particularly those consolidated in the liberal state since the mid-nineteenth century.

(Santos, 2002: 9)

The basis for this classification as semiperipheral is the fact that despite being a relatively large colonial power up until 1975, Portugal historically also found itself under different forms of control by, or dependence on, other European

¹¹ In his study *O silêncio do dândi e morte da esfinge*, which focuses on the definition of a late and anachronistic dandy identity particularly in Sá-Carneiro's epistolary discourse, Giorgio de Marchis also suggests that an understanding of the "nature of Sá-Carneiro's Modernism, characterized and originally connoted with the mixture of and coexistence of different temporalities" can be better understood within the framework of the concept of semiperiphery ["é a condição semiperiférica a chave que permite identificar a natureza do Modernismo de Sá-Carneiro, caracterizado e originalmente conotado com a amálgama e a coexistência de temporalidades diversas"] (2007: 19).

nations, particularly England. As Sousa Santos notes, such status affects the nations beyond the realm of economy, manifesting “itself also at the social, political, juridical and cultural levels,” (2002: 11) and has for the Portuguese “become a way of being in Europe and overseas” (2002: 12).

Sá-Carneiro’s texts recurrently illustrate the subject’s desire to be emancipated from a semiperipheral environment and fully be part of the centrality typically represented by the modern Paris, seen as the opposite of Lisbon. Moreover, this desire contributes to defining the permanent ontological deferment in Sá-Carneiro’s poetry that is so eloquently expressed in the poem “17,” when the subject states: “I am neither myself nor the other, | I am something in between: | A pillar in the bridge of spleen | That goes from me to the Other” [“Eu não sou eu nem o outro | Sou qualquer coisa de intermédio: | Pilar da ponte de tédio | Que vai de mim para o Outro”] (63). In other words the constant definition, in Sá-Carneiro, of the subject’s in-between identity that is neither the “I” nor the idealized, imagined, dreamed “Other,” but rather the fragmentary and eternally-incomplete process of attempting to reach it, is frequently dramatized in the gap between the universes of the less developed and the modern, staged in the sociologic and geographical distances between the semiperiphery and the spaces that come to symbolize sophistication and modernity.

In “Sawdust” we are told that the same soul that is to be left in the bathroom of a Parisian café once dreamt “of Russias” (100), and in “Dispersion,” a poem in fact written in Paris, we read that “my death | My utter dispersion | Exists far away, in the north, | In a great capital” [“a minha morte – | Minha dispersão total – | Existe lá longe, ao norte, | Numa grande capital”] (25). More importantly, in “Apex,” written in August 1915 in Paris as well, two years after “Dispersion,” and also and after the author has traveled between Lisbon and Paris, with a short stay in Barcelona, due to the beginning of World War I, the poetic subject confesses that his “idea of North, | Preconceived | [...] has always accompanied” him [“É como a ideia de Norte, | Preconcebida, | Que sempre me acompanhou...”] (109). The choice of the word “preconceived” is particularly meaningful here, as it points to a new realization of a not previously considered understanding of the relations between a hypothetically grandiose center and an underdeveloped periphery. The fact that this idea of North “always accompanied” the poetic subject emphasizes exactly the notion of feeling peripheral. More than referring to a specific and attainable location, it relates to a notion of centralized sophistication distant from the universe where the poetic subject comes from. In fact the verb *to accompany* describes the continuous mobility of the individual’s self-perception as semiperipheral. That is to say that no matter where the subject may be, the preconceived notion of a North, to be read as the center, would continue dislocating itself, or in any case might never be matched by reality.

To be clear, although the notion of being semiperipheral molds the desire to be part of the central modernity, we never come across a poetic subject who feels as though he is an individual victimized or cast aside on account of his nationality or origins. Quite the contrary, we find this subject experiencing a life that shares elements of both the flâneur and the dandy. The sense of belonging to the semiperiphery, however, is very visible in the continuous appeal for the Parisian centrality that is transversal to the poetry of Sá-Carneiro. It also permeates a feeling of loss with regard to Paris, when the city is recollected from afar, hypothetically from the distance of Lisbon. Mário de Sá-Carneiro's poetic subject experiences the notion of semiperiphery when he desires the modernity of Paris and when a lack of social integration is experienced within Paris itself, as well as when he recollects his loss of that city.¹² In "Elegy," a poem written in a period of time when Sá-Carneiro returns to Lisbon and directly works with Pessoa in the preparation of *Orpheu* (March 1915), and one in which it was not clear if he would go back to Paris, due to the development of World War I, Sá-Carneiro evokes symptomatically a reality seen as physically and chronologically distant: "Oh great universal hotel | of my frantic mistakes | With central heating | Crooks, prostitutes, gypsies... || Oh my cafés of great-life | With multicolor dancers... | – Ah, my pains are but | Their interrupted dance..." ["Ó grande hotel universal | Dos meus frenéticos enganos | Com aquecimento central, | Escrocs, cocottes, tziganos... || Ó meu café de grande-vida | Com dançarinas multicolores... | – Ai, não são mais as minhas dores | Que a sua dança interrompida..."] (82-83).

Moreover the recollection is sometimes of having been an outsider to the bourgeois society and having maintained his semiperipheral status with regard to the European centrality and modern life, even when he was present in Paris: "My boulevards of Europe and kisses | Where I was only a spectator..." ["Meus boulevards de Europa e beijos | Onde fui só um espectador..."] (81). The idea of loss is visible as well with regard to other exoticized locations, as when the subject sarcastically sees himself as a "Lord" of "Scotlands of prior lives" ["Lord que eu fui de Escócias doutras vidas"] (102) who lives now with "the deeply-rooted sensation | of having lost a great patrimony" ["a sensação em mim fincada há tanto | Dum grande património algures haver perdido"], one which arises from the loitering in the city and stopping at "the shop windows of opulent jewelry" ["Para às montras

¹² The clearest contrast with this worldview of Sá-Carneiro's poetic subject in Portuguese literature is the one presented by the Portuguese Modernist precursor Cesário Verde's "The Feeling of a Westerner," a poem highly influenced as well by Baudelairian texts, in which the subject also lives "an intimately sensorial relationship between the city and the self" (Klobucka, 2011: 11), but in which this feeling of centrality implied in the designation of "Westerner" can be fully experienced in the urban atmosphere of the city of Lisbon. With regard to this perspective, see the study "Introduction: Loitering on the Edge," by Anna Klobucka, in the bilingual edition of the poem (2011), and Rosa Maria Martelo's "Relendo 'O Sentimento dum Ocidental'" (Cesário Verde. *O Sentimento dum Ocidental*. Porto: Campo das Letras, 2005. 37-67).

de jóias de opulência”] (102). Eventually Paris comes to be seen as “the beautiful secret | Absent from my destiny” or a “Golden wine drunk | in a cup immediately broken” [“Paris do lindo segredo | Ausente no meu destino. (...) Meu vinho d’Oiro bebido | por taça logo quebrada...”] (95), and one the subject can never fully espouse: “Paris – my wolf and friend | – I wish I could sleep with you, | Be entirely your woman!...” [“Paris – Meu lobo e amigo... | – Quisera dormir contigo, | Ser todo a tua mulher!...”] (96).

As we saw before, the subject considers for the end of his physical identity “A hospital room – hygienic, all white, modern and tranquil; | Preferably in Paris – for the epitaph’s sake... (113). As for the soul, in a different poem we learn it has already been dealt with, in a magnificent formulation that synthesizes the role of modern Paris as an instrument and a mirror for the fragmentation and dissemination of the poetic subject’s identity, a dispersion that departs from the period’s utmost symbol of modernity, and at the same time illustrates the possibility of overcoming the semiperipheral status:

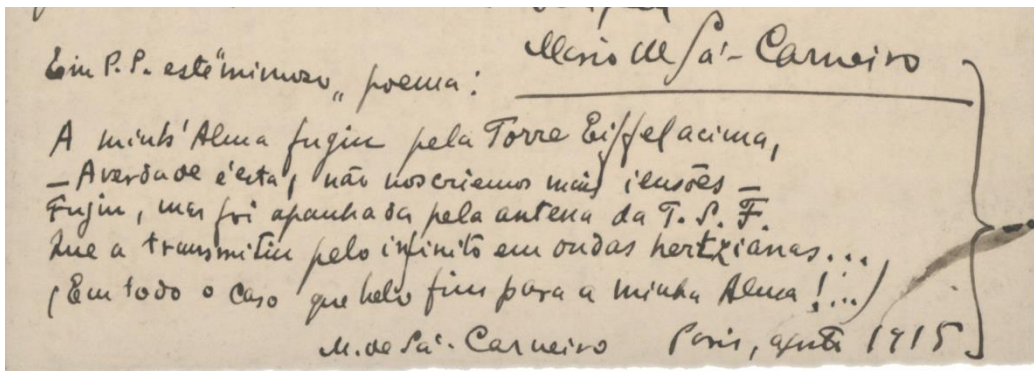


Fig. 9. BNP/E3, 115⁶-69a^r (pormenor).

My Soul escaped up the Eiffel Tower,
– That’s the truth, let’s create no illusions –
It escaped, but was caught by the T.S.F. antenna
Which transmitted it through infinity in Hertzian waves...

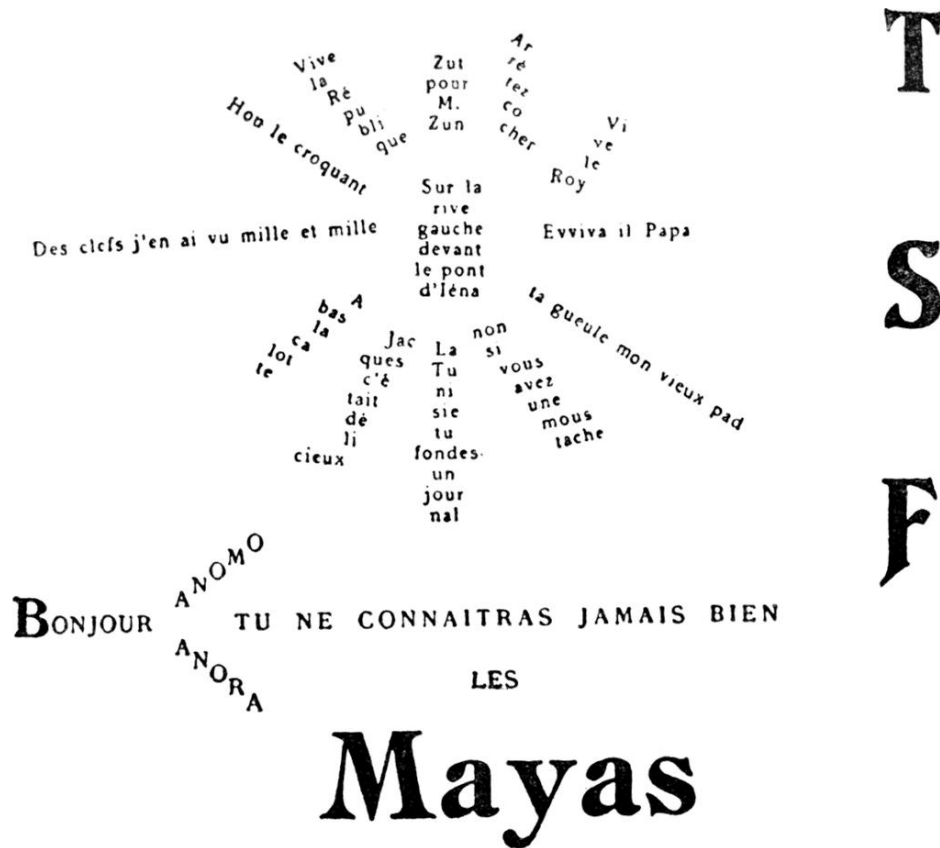
(In any case what a fine ending for my Soul!...)
Paris, August 1915

[A minh’ Alma fugiu pela Torre Eiffel acima,
– A verdade é esta, não nos criemos mais ilusões –
Fugiu, mas foi apanhada pela antena da T.S.F.
Que a transmitiu pelo infinito em ondas hertzianas...

(Em todo o caso que belo fim para a minha Alma!...]
Paris, agosto 1915]

(135)

Sá-Carneiro’s poem explores the imaginary of the wireless telegraphy T.S.F. system and of a central Eiffel Tower through which different signals and messages – and in his case the very Soul – are disseminated. He shares this imaginary with a section of Guillaume Apollinaire’s calligram “Lettre-Océan,” which was first published in the author’s *Soirées de Paris*, in June 1914 (Greet and Lockerbie, 1980: 380):



(Apollinaire, 1980: 59)

As noted by Marjorie Perloff in her study *The Futurist Moment – Avant-Garde, Avant-Guerre, and the Language of Rupture*, in Apollinaire’s calligram, the Eiffel Tower is indicated “by its location (‘Sur la rive gauche devant le pont d’Iéna’) and then by its height (‘Haute de 300 mètres’), [and] becomes the center of the circle from which radiate lines of words like radio waves departing in all directions from the transmitters in the Tower” (Perloff, 1985: 196). Moreover the central position defines the tower “as the focal point of the universe,” as is suggested by Greet and Lockerbie (1980: 381). Bearing in mind its expressive use in artistic discourses, Perloff talks of two birth dates for the Eiffel Tower, “first as a monument to industry, the centerpiece of the international Paris Exposition of 1889 and, only some twenty years later, as the emblem of the new Futurist aesthetic” (1986: 200). Upon its construction, a wave of artists expressed their dislike for the tower, in part due to their refusal of its more utilitarian dimension. These artists

tried to solve “the problem [the esthete’s longing to protect art from the encroachments of industry], to break down barriers between ‘high’ and ‘low,’ between, so to speak, the Ivory and the Eiffel towers” (Perloff, 1986: 201). Although the Eiffel Tower’s omnipresence in the city and its utilitarian dimension contributed decisively to its symbolic value and therefore affected its representation, Perloff suggests that its symbolism for the *avant-guerre* artists mainly derived from the tension between the public proposals for those technical uses and the fact that these uses were very quickly deemed obsolete, which was soon highlighted by the beginning of World War I: “Indeed, it was the very emptiness as a signifier that challenged the Futurist imagination to invent extravagant metaphors for it” (Perloff, 1986: 205).

Stemming from an esthetic language that is closer to Symbolism, in his adherence to the modernity of the city of Paris Mário de Sá-Carneiro joins the spirit and practice of the *avant-guerre* artists that take up the tower as a theme and of whom he is a contemporary. If for Apollinaire the Eiffel Tower is an “emblem of progress and revolution” (Perloff, 1986: 207), it is clearly so also for Sá-Carneiro. Moreover with Sá-Carneiro the Eiffel Tower is converted into the utmost metaphor for the fragmentation and indeed widespread dissemination of the modern subject and at the same time becomes a symbol that allows for suspending a semiperipheral status, by cancelling the tension between center and periphery, since, according to Sá-Carneiro’s poem, being in the utmost center becomes the condition to reach everywhere else. Marjorie Perloff tells us that “On 1 July 1913 the Eiffel Tower sent the first signal transmitted around the world, thus establishing a global electronic network that seemed to promise what the poets and painters were to call ‘simultaneity’” (Perloff, 1986, 205). Two years later, and in fact one year after the publication of Guillaume Apollinaire’s calligram, Sá-Carneiro engages this more utilitarian feature of the Eiffel Tower, the T.S.F., for his own poetic purposes. In a poem written before July 15 1910 (Marques, 1982: 243) that was not included in his book, titled “Telegraph Pole” [“Poste Télégráfico”], Sá-Carneiro had used already some of the imagery that integrates “My Soul escaped up the Eiffel Tower.”¹³ The earlier poem contrasts the bucolic space with a civilized one and starts by recollecting that the telegraph pole “Was tall, very tall. Once upon a time, green, | It lived in a pine forest,” and later became “a stripped pole (...) an immense I...” [“Er’alto, muito alto. Outr’ora, verdejante, | Viveu num pinheiral (...) Hoje é um poste liso (...) | A árvore tornou-se um imenso I...”] (Marques, 1982: 242). The simple contrast between the two spaces, however, yields a richer insight when the subject states that the pole “sustains the cords of the long tangle | that weaving the world together, takes the news to the world” [“No topo ele sustenta os fios da longa meada | que entrelaçando o mundo, ao mundo as novas leva”] (Marques, 1982: 242). As early as 1910 Sá-Carneiro expresses his

¹³ The poem is also included in *Poemas Completos* (Sá-Carneiro, 1996: 240-243).

fascination for the communication possibilities that the telegraphy allows, since it can link together distant spaces, such as the referred Paris and Belgrade. At that moment, the poetic subject tells us that in “the cables everything circulates” [“Nos fios circula tudo”] a perception that, as we saw with “Manucure,” is later corrected by the notion that “*It’s in the air that everything undulates! It’s there that everything exists!*” (45) and that is directly influenced by the author’s presence in Paris, his growing familiarity with the development of the T.S.F. and the exposure to the artistic and social anxiety regarding the uses and symbolism of the Eiffel Tower. Furthermore, on the one hand “My Soul escaped up the Eiffel Tower” highlights the fragmentation of the subject associated with the speed of modern times, since the subject’s “Soul” escapes up the tower, with no one to stop it, and finds a way to rapidly disseminate itself even further. On the other hand, the image in this poem allows for us to once again talk about a form of ascension, a rise, but this time to break with Sá-Carneiro’s paradigm of a subsequent fall, to which I have already referred. The Soul’s escape is not followed by a hypothetical fall from the top of the Tower, but rather by its universal expansion, and to this perhaps is owed the fact that the “end” is so “fine” (or “beautiful,” as we may choose to translate its “*belo fim*”). Ultimately focusing on the technical features associated with the T.S.F. transmission, Sá-Carneiro’s poetry finds in the Eiffel Tower the ideal instrument to perpetually espouse modernity and at the same time redeem the tension between center and periphery, since the subject’s absolute centrality represented by the Eiffel Tower becomes the condition for a form of ubiquity that at the same time prevents the possibility of a fall.

In the poetry of Mário de Sá-Carneiro, the city of Paris plays an essential role in the modern experience of fragmentation and dissemination of a poetic subject who is both semiperipheral and constantly experiments a form of ontological deferment. The fragmented identity disseminated in the central and modern French capital finds therefore in “My Soul Escaped up the Eiffel Tower” a perfect solution for its condition, as its exponential dispersion represented in this poem does not imply its demise, but rather a form of redemption in the occupation of infinity, in the progression of the Hertzian waves.

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