

The Stage of Mars: Representations of the First World War and its Social Effects on Portuguese Dramaturgy

Cláudia Figueiredo¹

Abstract

The theme of the First World War and its effects on European arts and literature is a theme that has already been widely explored, most notably in the theatrical field. Taking as its starting point a set of plays written both during the early stages of the war and in the postwar period, this article examines the evolution of attitudes towards the conflict in the dramaturgy produced in Portugal, paying particular attention to two main areas of influence: the traumatic nature of the conflict and the specificities of the national historical context.

Keywords

Great War, Theatre, Culture, Perceptions, Discourses

Resumo

O tema da Primeira Grande Guerra e dos seus efeitos foi por toda a Europa amplamente explorado na arte e na literatura, tendo tido significativa expressão na área do teatro. Partindo de um conjunto de peças escritas na fase inicial da guerra e no pós-guerra, este artigo tem como principal objectivo propor uma leitura da evolução das atitudes face ao conflito na dramaturgia em Portugal. Esta leitura contempla duas ordens de razões: a natureza traumática da conflagração e as especificidades do contexto histórico nacional.

Palavras-chave

Grande Guerra, Teatro, Cultura, Percepções, Discursos

¹ PhD student (Birkbeck College, University of London). Institute of Contemporary History (Faculty of Human and Social Sciences, New University of Lisbon). 1069-061 Lisbon, Portugal. *E-Mail* claudia.a.figueiredo@gmail.com

Introduction

The Great War has a “unique place” in the cultural history of Europe (Winter, 1994: 28). The great commotion caused by the unprecedented and brutal nature of the events that took place between 1914 and 1918 meant that culture would remain the “hostage” of war themes both during the conflict and in the years that followed it, as has been stressed by recent historiography (Ferro, 1999: 295). There were multiple representations of the war and its effects to be noted in all the arts throughout Europe: theatre, cinema, photography, prose and poetry, music and the visual arts. Partly generated by the great need for self-expression caused by the phenomena of war, this stream of words, sounds and images was, on the other hand, further enhanced by the expansion of the cultural industries and by the technological advances made during this period, as, for example, those taking place in the areas of cinema and photography.

However, the heterogeneity of this cultural production did not derive only from the wide range of available resources: it was based on the diversity of contents as well. This production had its roots in an enlarged participation, and included not only the work of artists, writers and intellectuals, but also of people from the civilian world who were occasionally involved in the arts world, and of many ex-soldiers, who contributed with their “aesthetics of direct experience” (Winter, 1995: 2). The unprecedented scale of this intellectual and artistic mobilization was one of the distinctive features of this cultural production, in which highly diverse creative impulses tended to intersect.

In spite of the belated and rather limited participation of Portuguese troops in the conflict, albeit with non-negligible effects (Samara, 1998: 89), this artistic mobilization was also to be noted in Portugal, where several *fado* songs, memoirs, poems and other texts inspired were written that were inspired by the war, including theatrical plays. As in other European countries, such as England and France, where the theme of the war had already been flourishing on stages since 1914, theatre was one of the media used in Portugal for representing war and its consequences. Between the first year of the conflict (1914) and the beginning of the dictatorial regime (1933), a considerable number of plays were written on the theme of the conflict and its effects, a subject that has not merited the full attention of theatre historians. In his work *Três Espelhos*, Luiz Francisco Rebello lists a large number of plays that were inspired by the Great War, although he does not attribute great importance

to this theme within the context of national dramaturgy². Rebello's account of the plays written on the theme is not an exhaustive one, and the numbers are naturally swelled when they are complemented by the results of empirical studies, as well as by information provided by other authors, such as Pedro Caldeira Rodrigues. In a recent study of theatrical revues during the period of the First Republic (1910-1926), he stresses the influence that the war had on Portuguese stages (Rodrigues, 2011). The pervasive influence of war themes in the country's artistic imagination can be easily observed not only in *fado* and musical theatre (which are the genres on which the author focuses his attention), but also in a considerable number of dramas and in several shorter texts intended to be read at private venues and frequently published in the theatrical almanacs of the time³. At the same time, there was also a tendency for foreign plays about the conflict to be included in national theatrical repertoires, traditionally consisting of Portuguese translations of French originals⁴.

Far from being exhaustive, this article seeks to contribute to our knowledge of the dramaturgy written about war in Portugal through the recovery of some lesser known texts, frequently overlooked by the historiography written on the subject of theatre. Belonging to a variety of theatrical genres (revue, comedy, drama) and serving different purposes (propaganda, reflection, denunciation), these plays suggest the existence of two distinct moments in the evolution of people's perceptions and attitudes about the conflict and its

² “Contrary to what happened in the field of literary memoirs (*A Malta das Trincheiras*, by André Brun, 1918; *Nas Trincheiras da Flandres*, by Augusto Casimiro; *Memórias da Grande Guerra*, by Jaime Cortesão; *Ao Parapeito*, by Pina de Morais; *Tropa d'África*, by Carlos Selvagem; all dating from 1919), the world conflict had little repercussion on our dramatic literature. Nonetheless, one must mention the purely circumstantial episodes of the plays written by Henrique Roldão (*Avante, Franceses!*, 1914, and *A Grande Guerra*, written with Emílio Alves, 1916), António de Oliveira (*Paz Bendita*, 1915) and Artur Marinha de Campos (*Depois da Vitória*, 1916) and, with direct reference to the Portuguese involvement in the war, the plays *O Amor na Base do C.E.P.* (Corpo Expedicionário Português), by Alexandre Malheiro, first staged in 1918 at the German prisoner-of-war camp in Bressen and published by Renascença Portuguesa the following year, *9 de Abril*, by Teresa Leitão de Barros (unpublished, 1919), *Portugal nas Trincheiras*, by Augusto Casimiro (1923), *A Irmã de Cruz de Guerra*, by Carlos Ferreira (1924), all of which were one-act plays, *Os Cegos*, by Joaquim Leitão (1926), *O Mutilado*, by J. Lapas de Gusmão (1928) and, lastly, *O Último dia d'um Condenado*, a ‘dramatic episode occurring during the world conflagration’, written by the Azorean journalist Carlos de Ornelas (1932), and another *9 de Abril*, by António Boto, which had little impact in terms of Portuguese dramaturgy (1938). But it was in the field of musical theatre, with the operetta *João Ratão*, by Ernesto Rodrigues, João Bastos and Felix Bermudes (1920), that the Portuguese army's presence in France was to find its most popular expression.” (Rebello 2010: 245-46).

³ Although these plays do not form part of the present analysis, we should mention as examples of these “minor texts”: “A Guerra: para lembrança dos dias calamitosos de 1914-15” (*Almanaque dos Palcos e Salas para 1916, 1915*: 80); “Amor militar: dueto cómico” (*Almanaque dos Palcos e Salas para 1919, 1918*: 75-77); “A volta do soldado” (*Idem*: 39-42); “Hora Fatal: monólogo dramático” (*Almanaque dos Palcos e Salas para 1920, 1919*: 70-73), and “Na Bélgica Mártir: para as mães portuguesas” (*Idem*: 80).

⁴ Examples of such plays include *A Alma Francesa*, by Artur Bernede and Aristide Bruent, premièred in September 1914 at Teatro Apolo (*O Mundo Teatral*, 15-11-1914:11-12), and *La charrette anglaise*, by George Berr, translated into Portuguese as *Os Três Noivos de Germana* and performed at Teatro Ginásio in December 1916 (*Eco Artístico*, 12-1916: 8-9).

individual and collective consequences. In analyzing part of this dramaturgy, this article proposes a reading of this evolution, divided into two parts.

The first part takes us back to 1916, the year of Portugal's official involvement in the war. Although it was not a new subject to be represented on Portuguese stages, the war theme became particularly popular in the months immediately following the country's official involvement in the conflict. In the prevailing environment of pro-war propaganda, the 1916 plays referred to in this article were characterized by a "nationalist reductionism", a feature that was common to all European interventionist discourse (Ferro, 1999: 298). Written by supporters of the interventionist cause, who included both military personnel and members of civil society, these texts represented attempts to create a national consensus around the Portuguese participation in the war and to achieve the "total mobilization of society" (Roshwald and Stites, 1999: 5). Seen as a path that would lead to the victory of civilization over barbarism, the Great War was already an immediate reality in 1916, yet still far from being understood in its catastrophic modern dimension.

The use of symbolic and celebratory language in the 1916 plays contrasts sharply with the dramatic tone of the postwar plays. In a second set of plays, written between 1920 and 1932, the initial enthusiasm is replaced by a sense of disillusion, and a feeling of loss and defeat is consequently prevalent in this second stage, despite the Allies' victory. A general awareness of the brutalities of war was added to its already evident effects, namely a severe social crisis and the subsequent abandonment of many of those who had returned from the battlefield. Consisting of an examination of three main threads – the internal conflict, anti-militarism and the problems of the ex-soldiers – this second stage marked a turning point in people's perceptions of the conflict, which culminated in the "de-mythologizing" of the Great War (Robb, 2002: 129), as well as in the confirmation of the vulnerability not only of the individual, but also of social relations.

1916: Portugal's involvement in the war and plays about the conflagration

Although the presence of Portuguese military forces in Angola and Mozambique had been a reality since 1914, Portugal only officially entered the conflict after the German declaration of war on the country on March 9, 1916. Taking place somewhat belatedly in the course of events, the involvement in war was not a peaceful matter within Portuguese society. At a political level, the "Sacred Union" government – formed one week after the declaration of war and based on an alliance between the Democratic Party, controlled by

Afonso Costa, and the Evolutionist Party, led by António José de Almeida – excluded from its composition the republican Unionist wing, the Socialists, the Royalists and the Catholics. Instead of reflecting a united position about the need to participate in the war, the Sacred Union was a political solution reached by the two main republican parties in order to guarantee their hold of power, and thus to impose their interventionist plan: to strengthen the patriotic republican project at an internal level, and to consolidate Portugal's position in an international context, by demonstrating the country's collaboration with Allied troops and thus reinforcing the old alliance with England.

And while the entry into the war was not a unanimous decision politically, the issue also gave rise to tension among a number of social forces. Just like the international anarchist movement, the Portuguese working-class movement was divided, and during those years a fierce ideological debate was opened in the press between pro-war and anti-war supporters (Santos and Ribeiro, 1986, Ventura, 1986). Split into two groups – those who condemned German imperialistic ambitions and those who defended the union of the proletariat against all wars – the movement had an ambiguous position towards the country's participation in the war. However, the anti-war argument became progressively identified with the fight against the high cost of living, so that this position eventually prevailed within the movement; during the tough years of 1917-18, there was little doubt that the war could only exacerbate the already precarious living conditions of the proletariat (Samara, 2002: 60).

Despite the considerable opposition to Portugal's participation in the conflict, news of the country's involvement in the war was warmly welcomed by many others. The inefficiency of the State's propaganda machine was offset by the strong determination and volunteer spirit of a significant number of supporters of the interventionist cause, leading to several unofficial initiatives being taken to mobilize public opinion in support of military intervention. The spontaneity of these actions demonstrated the existence of vigorous and genuine support for the interventionist cause, which was frequently promoted in newspapers, at conferences and at other events organized by non-State institutions and by many leading figures in intellectual circles. Nevertheless, these propaganda campaigns were based on the written and spoken word and largely focused on urban centers, having little impact on an essentially rural and illiterate population (Meneses, 2000: 95). But, as also happened in the belligerent countries (Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, 2002: 109-110), other non-coercive methods were used to reach a political consensus about the imperative need for Portuguese participation in the conflict. The patriotic and militarist plays that were

written, published and performed in 1916, the year of Portugal's entry into the war, formed part of this initial wave of propagandistic zeal.

Unlike written texts, theatre offered the possibility of wider access to interventionist propaganda, providing a tool that could overcome the limits imposed by widespread illiteracy. However, since it was “the most heavily censored of the art forms” (Robb, 2002: 136), theatre was subject to constraints of a different nature: censorship, which had been formally abolished from the theatre world during the transition to the republican regime, was maintained in practical terms throughout the republican period. The State never renounced its effective control over the programs planned by theatres, which it enforced through the continuous presence of police and representatives of the Civil Government at rehearsals and performances. Due to this veiled and sometimes quite active form of censorship, a number of plays were banned between the year of the implantation of the Republic (1910) and the year of the military coup that opened the doors for the introduction of a lengthy fascist regime in Portugal (1926)⁵. In 1916, the state of exception dictated by war justified a reinforcement of the government's control over the press. As in other belligerent countries, prior restraint was also established in Portugal, through the law of March 28. This law resulted in thousands of blank spaces appearing in newspapers, which caused great indignation among journalists (Carvalho, 1973: 20).

Despite the State's control over the theatre, the question of freedom of speech provoked a strong reaction among playwrights as well. In 1916, war censorship was criticized through comedy on the stage of Teatro Apolo in the revue *1916*, written by the playwright and Army officer André Brun. A year after the première of *1916*, the author, who was also a staunch republican, joined the war front, eventually returning home as a major. His memoirs of the conflict were published in 1919 under the title *A Malta das Trincheiras* (1919). Presented to the public on July 7 1916, *1916* is a musical play composed in verse, and was considered by some critics as “monotonous and graceless” (*O Mundo*, 8-7-1916: 2) and “scarcely original” (*Eco Artístico*, 7-1916: 5). In the two acts and seven scenes that make up the play, allusions are constantly made to “everything that is more or less concerned with the war – the major issue, dominating and compelling throughout that year in Portugal as well as in the world” (*Eco Teatral*, 4th week – 9-1916: 7). During the course of the play's action, a workman, student, seamstress, “street woman”, and policeman, among

⁵ Glória Bastos and Ana Isabel Vasconcelos have identified some plays whose performance was banned during the First Republic: in 1912, *Ordinário, Marche!*, by Bento Mântua; in 1918, the play *Os Mineiros*, and a few years later *Mar Alto*, by António Ferro; and, in 1923, *O Lodo*, by Alfredo Cortez (Bastos, Vasconcelos 2004: 83-86).

others, come on stage to comment on the events of the year. Censorship is invoked by the group of policemen who refer to it as follows: “the newspapers’ censorship / we make merciless / cuts to letters and rubbish / which offend authority” (Brun, 1916: 15). Brun uses comedy and laughter to address the problem of censorship without actually being censored⁶.

The references to war censorship are matched in the play by a call for patriotic unity and for taking a stance in the war. It is significant that the reference to the need for social cohesion comes from the workman’s mouth:

“In the old days it was easy / to preach peace or disarmament / the motherland was not yet threatened / with the most cruel and ferocious upheaval. / One could then be a utopian / but in the cruel hour in which you see us / do not say I am a unionist’ again / State only ‘I am Portuguese.’” (*Idem*: 8)

Although he exposed the tensions that existed at the social level, embodied by the character of the workman, Brun simultaneously called for the elimination of social divisions and for all classes to unite in support of the national cause. At the same time, besides the need for mobilization within the country itself, the state of exception created by the war also required the involvement of all nations, and the “Chorus of Neutrals” was thus used to criticize Spain’s refusal to adopt a position with regard to the conflict (*Idem*: 5).

The patriotic pro-war feeling was also fueled by leading figures from the proletarian world, such as the typographer, composer of *fado* songs, poet and dramatist Avelino de Sousa⁷. In the play *Portugal na Guerra*, written in verse and published in 1916, the typographer introduces a series of allegorical characters (the Law of Force = the imperial forces, and the Force of Law = the allied forces, France, England, Italy, Russia, Montenegro, Serbia, Romania, King Albert and Portugal) in order to justify the allied cause, as well as to situate Portugal in the conflict by stressing the decisive role played by this small country’s participation in liberating peoples from the “German hoof” (Sousa, 1916: 9). Written in a more serious tone than the one favored by Brun in his revue, Avelino de

⁶ Another revue performed in 1916, *Novo Mundo*, written by A Parceria (Felix Bermudes, Ernesto Rodrigues and João Bastos), invoked the problem of war censorship in the section “Tio Verdades e Tio Censura” (Rodrigues 2011: 62-63). This play by A Parceria was a resounding success, being by far the most popular play at the box office at that time (*Eco Teatral*, 1st week -10-1916:1).

⁷ Highly active in the theatrical press, Avelino de Sousa was also the author of another play inspired by the world conflict, entitled *A Guerra*, and performed for the first time on August 8, 1919, at Teatro Avenida.

Sousa's play has epic tones, using both a symbolic language and certain scenic devices to highlight the belligerent message. In a crescendo, the allied nations gather together on the stage to the sound of military marches. In the middle of the action, Portugal, embodied by a white-bearded old man wearing a sailor's outfit (an obvious allusion to Portugal's overseas history), joins the "Chorus of Nations" against imperial tyranny. In keeping with the same line of ideas, the ancient nation defends itself against the accusation of subservience towards British interests, which was leveled against it by Germany in its declaration of war⁸: "I've been called a vassal of England! (...) It is necessary to sweep the insult away!" (*Idem*: 15). The German offense is dealt with by the courage of the Portuguese troops (both army and navy forces) who enter the scene to the sound of another military march. Throughout the text, the racial virtues of the "free, stringent, audacious and unyielding" Portuguese people are repeatedly praised (*Ibidem*).

The "race" theme inspired another play in 1916, *Raça Lusitana*, a one-act play written in prose and taking place on the day that Germany declared war on Portugal, written by Carlos d'Alcântara Carreira. Performed on May 16 that year at the República Theatre, the play aroused a negative response from the specialist press, and the language was described as being "very banal, without any ideas at all" (*Eco Artístico*, 5-1916: 7). The plot is based on the story of an old major with a brilliant military past in Africa. A man of action, the major returns home reduced to a mere shadow of his former self: "And then he is attacked by that accursed paralysis, the sedentary life into which he is thrown after a life full of combat under the great African sun! They shut the eagle in an office cage, and as such they atrophy him" (Carreira, 1916: 17). His demobilization and consequent acceptance of a bureaucratic occupation takes away all the meaning from his life. However, on hearing the news of Portugal's involvement in the war, the major is healed, as if by miracle.

War is depicted in the play as having magical qualities, showing the capacity to revive the active side to the major's character. Standing up suddenly, and "quickly donning a uniform", he immediately volunteers to join the troops (*Idem*: 28). The grandeur of the "Lusitanian race" is stressed throughout the play by blending extracts from *Os Lusíadas*, an epic poem written in the 16th century by the Portuguese poet, Luís de Camões, with countless references to national heroes. The play ends to the sound of the republican national anthem, *A Portuguesa*, "SUNG BY ALL" (*Idem*: 32), a finale which, according to the newspaper *Diário de Notícias*, "made the audience pulsate in a united display of great

⁸ "In this way, the Portuguese Government made it known that it considers itself a vassal of England, which submits all other considerations to English interests and wishes" (quoted in Meneses, 2009: 275).

patriotic affection” (*Diário de Notícias*, 17-5-1916: 2). It should be noted that, although this was a common feature of musical theatre at that time, the frequent use of a chorus in these patriotic plays acquired its own special meaning: a sense of unison, with the chorus symbolizing collective harmony, and in these specific cases this may be seen as a technique used to unleash the highly prized national unity of the people.

Other patriotic plays were written in 1916, and some of them were performed by amateur groups from outside the capital city, Lisbon, in order to take the pro-war propaganda to the population living on the periphery of the large urban centers. This was the case with *Mulheres da Cruz Vermelha*, a dialogue written by Firmino Vilhena. The play was performed in Lisbon, Aveiro and Viseu by women from the *Cruzada das Mulheres Portuguesas*, the main female institution placed at the service of interventionist propaganda, and benefited from the money generated by the sales of the published text. The play tells the story of a French nurse who volunteers to join the Red Cross in order to perform what she understands as her duty. Although it meditates upon the brutal nature of war, which “spreads gloom, misery and mourning” (Vilhena, 1916: 4), the play nevertheless acts as a spur to patriotic action, while also attempting to define the women’s role in the conflict: to ease the suffering of others and to bravely bear their own suffering with stoicism and selflessness. This nurturing function is stressed in another 1916 play, *Depois da Vitória*, a one-act drama written by the Army officer Marinha de Campos. The play is set inside an ambulance where a Red Cross nurse and a Charity nurse attend to men wounded in the war (*Almanaque dos Palcos e Salas para 1917*, 1916: 8). As was the case with *Mulheres da Cruz Vermelha*, the play was performed by amateur groups for the purposes of solidarity, but it was also used as an instrument for mobilizing civilians in support of the war efforts.

An unfinished war? The turning point in the sphere of representations.

When the war ended, on November 11 1918, it was a time for settling accounts: nearly 14 million casualties and 20 million wounded was the outcome of the tragic four-year-long conflict that no one had expected would last so long. Although it was enthusiastically celebrated by the people, the final victory of the allied forces was not enough to provide a feeling of complete victory in the medium term. With a total of 105,000 men mobilized, the young Portuguese Republic reached the end of the war with 8,000 deaths to mourn and an identical number of disabled people to take care of (Afonso 2009: 297). Furthermore, the political climate was particularly unstable and the economic

and social crisis had been aggravated even further by the conflict. Faced with this picture of individual and collective grief, it ceased to be possible to go on projecting light or epic images of war: these simply did not match the reality of a tragedy whose effects persisted long after the end of the conflagration. War had inflicted hard-to-heal wounds on the national social fabric, and, besides the problem of how to reintegrate the demobilized soldiers, there was also a severe problem of subsistence. Contrary to what was expected, the end of the war had not brought a halt to the hoarding and speculation in essential goods, and complaints about shortages, the rate of inflation and even the adulteration of food were a constant feature of Portuguese life that lasted well after the conflict. In the preface that he wrote in 1931 to the memoirs of the ex-soldier Eduardo de Faria, published under the title *Expedicionários*, General Norton de Matos, who had been the Minister of War at the time when Portugal officially entered the conflict, referred to the continuing durability of this internal tension:

“But with the Great War, as with all wars, it was not just soldiers who suffered. The group of those who profited from it is always limited, and in our country these people can be counted on the fingers of one hand. The bulk of the population continues to suffer, and quite terribly too, due to a war that ended 13 years ago. Ended? Are we not just passing through a period of truce? (...). Disgracefully, among us, the days of anxiety did not end with the Armistice; there is no external peace, and, worst of all, we do not have internal peace.” (Faria 1931: v-vi).

Almost prophetically, Norton de Matos’ words give us an idea of the social atmosphere experienced in the transition to the fascist regime. The sense of outrage people felt about the illicit enrichment of others, which caused a significant part of the population to endure severe deprivation, was expressed in organized actions during and after the war, such as rallies in protest against the high cost of living, promoted by the proletariat, and strikes demanding wage increases, or in spontaneous initiatives such as attacks on warehouses designed to ensure the availability of the essential goods that were being hoarded. As noted by the historian Fernando Rosas, the conflict had plunged the country into a state of “larval civil war” (Rosas, 2009: 248); even though the cessation of hostilities had brought an end to the international conflagration, this did not solve the internal contradictions, and the large mass of workers and consumers still remained hostages of the

greed of the agricultural, industrial and commercial forces. On the other hand, successive republican governments had shown themselves to be incapable of solving the situation, resulting in the ever greater discredit of the regime in the eyes of large sections of society.

Some Portuguese plays from the postwar period incorporated this idea of an internal front that had developed as a consequence of the conflict. One of these was *Adão e Eva*, written by Jaime Cortesão, one of the intellectuals who most actively contributed to the republican interventionist propaganda in the early years of the conflict. As a volunteer, he joined the Flanders front as a medical captain. In 1919, he published his *War Memoirs* which, according to Elisa Travessa, launched “a new stage of reflections and a new form of writing in Jaime Cortesão’s work” (Travessa, 2004: 89). In her opinion, the war’s cutting edge can be seen in Cortesão’s writing; in his first two plays, *Infante de Sagres* (1916) and *Egas Moniz* (1918), written in the period of interventionist propaganda, Cortesão used the national past to embellish the Portuguese spirit; in the drama *Adão e Eva*, premièred on May 21, 1921, at the Ginásio Theatre, Cortesão shifted his attention to his own time, which he questioned through the main character (*Idem*: 48-49).

The action takes place against a background of social unrest, and the protagonist is Marcos, an idealistic young man who has just returned from Flanders and onto whose character Cortesão seems to project himself. On his return, Marcos encounters a society that is divided between opulence and deprivation, he falls out with his future father-in-law, an industrialist and war profiteer, who “lives by conjuring up dark trades” (Cortesão, 1921: 92), and eventually he leads a workers’ movement at his factory. Meanwhile, a popular uprising breaks out on the streets, an “explosion of despair (...) a heavy sum of accumulated mistakes and hatreds” (*Idem*: 22). In spite of Marcos’ pleas to the raged mob, the episode culminates in the wounding and killing of people. In Marcos’ account of events, the mob is depicted as a “group of harassed wolves” and the police repression is understood to have been a matter of great violence (*Idem*: 75). In symbolic terms, one can say that Cortesão’s mob represents the very opposite of the first play’s chorus, a perfectly identifiable collective, which is strong and ordered; it is rather an anonymous mass, disjointed and chaotic, with little hope of victory.

After the mob’s defeat, Marcos ironically congratulates his future father-in-law: “We were beaten, me and the scum. You, on the contrary, have triumphed. You are about to accomplish your ideal: to transform the Earth into a sales counter and the whole of life into a business” (*Idem*: 91). This condemnation of war profiteers does not mean Marcos supports the mob’s actions: deeply disappointed, he asks himself: “Are they all the same on

both sides?! Is there something unrepentant in human evil?” (*Idem*: 82). The problem that is raised is that of human nature itself, which Cortesão believes to be vile and corrupted.

The play aroused widespread and vigorous public criticism. In response to a call from *Diário de Lisboa*, several leading intellectuals expressed their opinion about the play. In this survey, writers such as Raul Brandão, Raul Proença and Aquilino Ribeiro defended their Seara Nova colleague against the hostility and lack of understanding shown by his conservative critics. (*Diário de Lisboa*, 1-6-1921: 2; 2-6-1921: 2; 3-6-1921: 2). As for Norberto de Araújo and Almada Negreiros, these two were less kind about Cortesão’s work: the former considered the play to be “poorly developed” and “primitively declaratory” (*Idem*, 7-6-1921: 2), while the latter confessed his disappointment with a play that he considered excessive in thought and lacking in imagination (*Idem*, 4-6-1921: 3). The survey thus revealed evidence of aesthetic tensions between the Seara Nova group and the emerging modernist movement. In the theatrical press, the political message of this drama was negatively explained; in *Jornal dos Teatros*, despite the recognition of the literary value and the refinement of the language used, the text was described as an “excellent partisan lecture” and the play was said to be worth little or nothing in itself (*Jornal dos Teatros*, 29-5-1921: 6). On the other hand, in spite of its having a philosophical rather than a political purpose, as explained by the author himself,⁹ the play was immediately put to use in proletarian circles as trade union propaganda; the attack on war profiteers and the demand for social justice that the drama partly showed, were mentioned in great detail by the daily newspaper *A Batalha* – the mouthpiece of the Portuguese workers’ organization. In its pages, various performances were documented, as well as other initiatives that were complementary to the play, such as conferences promoted by those involved in the workers’ movement¹⁰.

The successful formula of *Adão e Eva* among proletarian audiences was to be repeated the following year, in 1922, when another play was performed dealing with postwar social issues. Written by Jorge Teixeira, the three-act drama *Gatunos de Luva Branca* is a vehement condemnation of hoarding and exploitation and an (unreserved) defense of the population. First staged in a rural environment, in the city of Évora, and performed in aid of the Francisco Ferrer School, by the amateur troupe Luz e Liberdade (organized by the railway workers of the South and South-East region), the play has the same structure as

⁹ “However, I believe that if my play reaches any conclusion, this takes the form of a religious and philosophical assertion. If it seeks to define anything, it is a heroic concept of freedom.” (Jaime Cortesão in *Diário de Lisboa*, 5-5-1921:5).

¹⁰ This was the case with the talks given by Mário Domingues, on June 6 at the *Associação dos Caixeiros* (Association of Clerks) and promoted by the Center of Young Trade Unionists (*A Batalha*, 7-6-1921: 1); by Cristiano Lima, on June 8 at the *Associação dos Empregados de Escritório* (Association of Office Workers) (*Idem*, 4-6-1921: 1); and by Câmara Reis, on June 3 at the Universidade Livre (*Ibidem*).

Adão e Eva; a young couple in love (she an industrialist's daughter, he an idealistic engineer with revolutionary sympathies), and a riot that breaks out on the streets. According to the local press, the venue was "ordinary but warm" and in the end the audience received the play with "much clapping and cheering" (*O Alentejo*, 30-5-1922: 2).

The theme of "popular anger" is portrayed in the play through a crowd armed with "rifles, sticks and sickles" (Teixeira, 1923: 69). Composed not only of workers, the crowd "is the people, the anonymous lion", enraged by exploitative and greedy forces, although the protagonist, Rafael, unlike Marcos, is able to control them with words (*Idem*: 70). After avoiding further excesses, Rafael completes his mission by persuading the industrialists of the need for social justice. Like Marcos, Rafael is an apostle of a new world, but his political stance is much less ambiguous. Unlike Marcos, isolated in his moral superiority, Rafael supports the dictatorship of the proletariat as a "transitional measure" ultimately leading to "the communist society" (*Idem*: 75), identifying himself with the collective revolutionary project launched in Russia in 1917, in which the international proletariat had pinned great hopes. The play's final appeal is not aimed at the individual consciousness but rather at the concerted action of workers, the "laborers of the new society" (*Idem*: 74). The internal conflict is understood by Teixeira as a clash of class interests and not, as it is by Cortesão, as a dispute between good and evil. However ideologically different they may be from one another, Teixeira and Cortesão's plays converge in relation to one particular aspect: the perception that the end of the conflagration did not mean peace and that, on the contrary, the maintenance of an exploitative economic system in the years that followed the war prolonged the internal crisis, which was often expressed in violent confrontations.

The overriding social problem is not the only topic of these postwar plays. As Antoine Prost stresses, death also occupied a central place in the literary and artistic representations of this period (Prost, 1994: 17-18), a tendency that is also to be found in these texts. In the tragic farce *Não Matarás*, death plays a central role in the plot. Written by the anarchist writer César Porto, the play was published in installments between January and March 1924 over the course of nine issues of the literary supplement of the proletarian daily newspaper *A Batalha*. The drama centers around the grief of two parents suffering from the loss of their young and only son, killed in the war. Those to blame for the tragedy are identified: Afonso Costa and Bernardino Machado, the main architects of the republican interventionist plan. Based on an individual tragedy, the death of a child, César Porto's play is an exercise in dismantling the patriotic argument, and was immediately considered by a journalist of *A Batalha* to be "a vibrant cry of *Down with War!*", in keeping

“with the best antimilitarist literary and philosophical works” (*A Batalha*, 3-1-1924: 1). Sharing internationalist and pacifist libertarian views, César Porto tackles the roots of the patriotic feeling that the 1916 plays tried to create, by depicting the motherland as a “gargantuan boy” who “seems to live off human flesh” (Porto, 28-1-1924: 3), and war as a useless phenomenon that is synonymous with an inferior state of civilization (Porto, 3-3-1924: 6).

The drama of the survivors is another subject that is invoked in this second stage of representations of the war and its effects. The end of the conflagration presented a new problem, one of war invalids who, unable to work and deprived of any support from the State, were frequently driven to begging and crime. Several initiatives were introduced to try and remedy these men’s precarious situation, such as the foundation of support organizations, (as, for example, the *Liga dos Combatentes da Grande Guerra*, 1921), and the reporting of the problem in newspapers such as *O Mutilado*, a “newspaper for the humble” published between 1920 and 1921 in order to “demand justice and recognition for those who have fought in wars” (Afonso, 1986).

This theme corresponds to another sort of loss: the loss of physical or mental integrity. This is what we find in the play *O Mutilado*, written by the ex-soldier Lapas de Gusmão. Published in 1928, four years before the edition of his memoirs (*Visão da Guerra*), the play was written in 1920, shortly after the author’s return from the battlefields of Flanders. Set in the spring of 1919, the plot is about a soldier who has been badly wounded in the war and now returns home. There he finds that his wife, who thought that he had vanished forever, has taken up with a new partner. In the personal drama of the wounded war veteran, Lapas de Gusmão exposes the situation of ex-warriors, reminding us of the difficulties of their social and affective reintegration. Moreover, as the author states in the preface, the play is “a cry of indignation and outrage against a society of cynics and hypocrites”, which had only “forgetfulness, contempt, abomination and crime” to offer its soldiers (Gusmão, 1928: vi).

The bitterness caused by oblivion and ingratitude towards ex-soldiers, a central theme in the memoirs of veterans, is also explored in the one-act drama *E quando a Guerra acabou*, written by ex-expeditionary Eduardo de Faria. The text was printed at the *Liga dos Combatentes* print shop in 1932, with the revenue from the sale of copies being handed to the institution. The play consists of a dialogue between two friends, both of them ex-soldiers in France, one of whom is “a man with discernment” (yet suffering from tuberculosis), while the other is simply “mad”. The former pays the latter a visit at the

mental institution where he spends his days washing his hands compulsively, hands which he stills believes to be stained by the blood from the trenches. No longer heroic or regenerating, such as it was depicted in the 1916 plays, war is now described by Eduardo de Faria as a collective and persistent tragedy:

“But war exists and will exist as long as just one of us remains alive. War is you, it is me, it is the multitude that has suffered (...). War is that cripple with his legs ripped off by a grenade; war is that little child without a father; war is that woman dressed in black who does not have her daily bread; and war is also that spectacle of selfishness and deaf resentment, the tremendous odyssey of so many, the calvary of plenty, the abandonment of immensity.” (Faria, 1932: 16)

War did not end with the Armistice; instead, it was being reactivated in the daily drama of misery and oblivion into which a sizeable part of the population had been plunged. The hardening of the internal front rapidly swept away the fragile illusions of patriotic unity produced by the earlier plays. While the enormous difficulties deriving from the conflagration had contributed to the fall of the First Republic and led to the emergence of a dictatorial regime in Portugal that would last for another 48 years, they also seem to have shaped the representations of a war that had in fact been an inglorious one for most of the population. In the years that followed the conflict, theatre became one of the forms used for describing the pain of warfare and engaging in an exercise of metaphysical reflection, but, at the same time, it also offered a platform for denouncing forgetfulness and dramatizing the aggravated internal tensions.

Conclusion

The shift in representations of the Great War, from the expansive optimism of earlier plays to the dismal and introspective tone of postwar texts, reflects a change in the perception of the conflict. It came to be regarded as an “immense cataclysm”, and led to the disappearance of “an aesthetic and ethical code of heroism, courage and violent battle” (Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, 2002: 28). The simplified language of the traditional representational codes used in 1916, which reflected the spirit of a crusade and were also inspired by old “notions of chivalry” (Winter, 2004: 206), was rendered outdated by the

awareness of the modern nature of the conflict. This shift corresponded to an evolution in the use of theatrical genres for the representation of war themes: if, in the year of 1916, we can note a prevalence of comedies and plays written in an epic tone, which lighten the heart and exalt the phenomena of war, later on it was drama that tended to be the predominant tone, and patriotic feelings were replaced by a sense of loss and defeat. Thus the dramatization of the theatrical narrative matched the dramatization of individual and collective life during this period, making it possible, on the one hand, to deal with the past and to consolidate the memory of the conflict through a written medium, and, on the other hand, to consider the present in the light of the new social and political conditions created by the war.

The dramatization of the theme of the Great War and its effects mobilized very different wills and projects. Calling for the participation of people that were quite distinct from one another (some of them, such as ex-soldiers, had previously been left on the margins of playwriting activity), there was a great diversity to be noted in the plays that were inspired by this theme, a situation that possibly explains the unequal literary quality of this set of plays. This aspect should not discourage further research; instead it should be an incentive to think more systematically about the increased participation in artistic production that the war seems to have stimulated. On the other hand, the conflict's repercussions on Portuguese theatre still needs to be examined in greater depth in order to clarify certain aspects, not only those related to the texts or their reception, but also those relating to the processes of staging and performing these and other plays, some of which have already been identified although there are others that still remain to be identified. I hope that this article may serve as a stimulus for future research into a theme that is still underexplored and lends itself to be studied from a wide range of different perspectives.

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