

Father, Son, and Holy Ghost— Love triangles in Portuguese *Modernismo*

[Pai, Filho e Espírito Santo – Triângulos de amor no Modernismo português]

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Keywords

Fernando Pessoa, José de Almada Negreiros, Alfredo Pedro Guisado, *Modernismo*, Holy Trinity, *Orpheu*, *Contemporânea*.

Abstract

This article explores a melodramatic pattern in early-twentieth-century Portuguese literature that leads to the publication of *Contemporânea* in 1922: the repeated allusions to God and the Christian Holy Trinity as a dramatic metaphor of the poet's process of creation. The insistence on these divine metaphors of eroticism, faithfulness, and love triangles points to the way Portuguese writers view religion in dramatic terms. This article traces an aesthetic line that leads to *Contemporânea*, through three authors and a selection of their publications in specific moments throughout the first decades of the twentieth century: Fernando Pessoa's dramatic poem *Portugal*, an unfinished project whose writing process took place between 1910-1913; Alfredo Pedro Guisado's poem "Ante Deus", published in the 1915 first issue of *Orpheu*; and a selection of José de Almada Negreiros' illustrations included in *Contemporânea* in 1922.

Palavras-chave

Fernando Pessoa, José de Almada Negreiros, Alfredo Pedro Guisado, *Modernismo*, Santa Trindade, *Orpheu*, *Contemporânea*.

Resumo

Este artigo explora um padrão melodramático na literatura portuguesa do início do século XX que conduz ao Modernismo e à publicação de *Contemporânea* em 1922: as repetidas alusões a Deus e à Santíssima Trindade cristã como metáfora dramática do processo de criação do poeta. A insistência nestas metáforas divinas de erotismo, fidelidade e triângulos amorosos aponta para o modo como os escritores portugueses veem a religião em termos dramáticos. Este artigo traça uma linha estética que conduz à *Contemporânea*, através de três autores e de uma seleção das suas publicações em momentos específicos ao longo das primeiras décadas do século XX: o poema dramático de Fernando Pessoa, *Portugal*, um projeto inacabado cujo processo de escrita decorreu entre 1910-1913; o poema "Ante Deus", de Alfredo Pedro Guisado, publicado no primeiro número de *Orpheu* em 1915; e uma seleção de ilustrações de José de Almada Negreiros incluídas na *Contemporânea* em 1922.

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The publication of the first issue of *Contemporânea*, in 1922, takes place in a context of transformation and rupture in Portuguese literature. The appearance of avant-garde literary magazines across Europe in the first decades of the twentieth century fueled the waves of a new Portuguese *Modernismo*. To an extent, writers and artists in Portugal shape their new voices in an inescapable framework of a literary hodgepodge. While many of them express a zealous animosity against their predecessors, they cannot escape the ambivalence of turn-of-the-century aesthetics. Writers from Portuguese *Modernismo* continue to uphold literary and philosophical traditions, through writings that reveal their hesitant role as thresholds between past, present, and future.¹

This article explores a melodramatic pattern in early-twentieth-century literary texts and publications in Portugal: the repeated allusions to God and the Christian Holy Trinity, as a dramatic metaphor for the poet and the artist's process of creation. The insistence on these divine metaphors of eroticism, faithfulness, and love triangles points to the way *Modernismo* views religion in dramatic terms. The work of many Portuguese writers reveals an understanding of poetic creation as the result of a melodramatic process that resembles the logics of impregnation, reproduction, and love reciprocity in Christian tradition.

The themes and forms that the writers and artists published in *Contemporânea* introduce draw extensively from earlier religious and dramatic explorations. This article will analyze some of these earlier manifestations in order to trace a line that leads to *Contemporânea*. I will address three authors and a selection of their publications in specific moments in time: Fernando Pessoa's dramatic poem *Portugal*², an unfinished

¹ MATOS (2007) explores the political, economic, social, and religious unrest that is prevalent in turn-of-the-century Portuguese authors. On the brink of Portuguese *Modernismo*, this generation's particular "atitude mental" [mental attitude] is characterized by "um olhar marcadamente pessimista ressoando o pensamento de filósofos como E. Hartmann e Schopenhauer. Os poetas da época exprimem com especial acuidade um acentuado sentimento decadentista de desengano, desistência e tédio. [...] Em sociedades que caminhavam na senda da secularização e do laicismo, caía-se na dúvida e na incerteza, a anunciar as perplexidades do homem moderno" (MATOS, 2007: 27-28) [a noticeably pessimistic outlook that echoed philosophers such as E. Hartmann and Schopenhauer. Turn-of-the-century poets sharply manifest an acute decadent feeling of disillusion, withdrawal, and ennui. (...) In societies that walked along the path of secularization and laicism, there was a proclivity toward doubt and uncertainty, which announced the perplexities of modern mankind].

² *Portugal* anticipates the structure and themes that Pessoa would then develop in *Mensagem*. A total of 106 manuscripts comprises *Portugal*'s five cantos and epilogue, plus other fragments that are not attributed to specific cantos (some fragments are labeled as belonging to the "Último Canto" [Last Canto], which could refer to either the fifth canto or an additional sixth canto). As a direct predecessor of *Mensagem* and a dramatic poem that ambiguously builds the Portuguese nation in a style reminiscent of Luís de Camões, *Portugal* reveals new insights on the genetic history and interpretations of *Mensagem*, Pessoa's only published full book. These manuscripts were first transcribed and published in the 17th issue of *Pessoa Plural*, in 2020, as a result of an edition project conducted by Rui Sousa, Jerónimo Pizarro, Carlos Pittella, and Nicolás Barbosa.

project written between 1910-1913; Alfredo Pedro Guisado's poem "Ante Deus", published in the first issue of *Orpheu* in 1915; and a selection of José de Almada Negreiros' illustrations included in *Contemporânea* in 1922.

The seed of a love story: the father

Various instances throughout *Portugal* introduce the figure of God in dramatic and affective-erotic terms.³ This section will analyze two stanzas from *Portugal*, both of which are emblematic of a proclivity toward a melodramatic religious staging in Portuguese *Modernismo* and early-twentieth century aesthetics.

As seen in one of the unnumbered stanzas of *Portugal*'s first canto, the figure of God appears as analogous to the poet:

Senti-me só, abandonado e pouco;	[I felt alone, abandoned, and belittled;
E como a nympha que emprenha d'um deus,	And as the nymph that a god has impregnated,
Expira de commoção e □ louco	That expires out of commotion and foolish □
Ao sentir-se no ventre □	When the □ womb feels
O sentimento que me torna rouco	The feeling that makes me raucous
O segredar do pensamento aos seus	The secrets that reason whispers to its
Sentidos intimos, excede a real	Intimate senses, exceed the real
Natureza da minha alma □	Nature of my □ soul] ⁴

(Pessoa, *apud* BARBOSA, PIZARRO, PITTELLA e SOUSA, 2020: 91; BNP/E3, 11⁷ EN-2^v)⁵

The poet introduces God as an undetermined deity ("um deus" [*a god*]) contained in a simile of impregnation. The verses establish a relationship between the idea of sexual intercourse and God. Feminized, the poet compares himself to a fertilized nymph and, as an incarnation of a female divinity, his womb carries the seed of a god. The indetermination of this god implies a plurality of deities or, inversely, a singular collective whose members are not particular but interchangeable. Throughout

³ Pessoa's blasphemous use of sacred concepts could be linked to the fact that the poet "sofre o influxo de uma educação britânica, sendo, por isso, menos perturbado pelo sentimentalismo congénito e panteísta português" (FERNANDES, 1968: 39) [*suffers from the influence of a British education and is, therefore, less troubled by the Portuguese congenital and pantheistic sentimentality*]. Pessoa's approach to divinity is filled with contradiction: "Poeta lúcido, [...] porque, sem fé em nenhuma das religiões, sabe que lhe falta o apoio da crença numa divindade presente que assuma verdadeiras funções paternais e o guie. Daí o amargor que se denota em todas as contradições religiosas da sua obra e na metafísica no Sagrado que procura, nesse desejo de estar face a face com o mistério do Divino" (FERNANDES, 1968: 52) [*A lucid poet, (...) because, despite his lack of faith in any religion, he knows he also lacks the supporting belief in a present divinity that takes on a true fatherly and guiding role. This explains the bitterness of all the religious contradictions in Pessoa's corpus and in his long-sought metaphysics of the Sacred, in his desire to stand face to face before the mystery of the Divine*].

⁴ This and all ensuing English translations are my own and were done only for the purposes of this article.

⁵ The stanza is originally found in manuscript 11⁷ EN-2^v of the Fernando Pessoa archive (E3) at Portugal's National Library (BNP) in Lisbon.

this simile of procreation, the poet does not fully identify the other progenitor, but offers a hint: the undetermined father is a god.

The image of fertilization is analogous to the process of literary creation. The stanza defines both processes as a change in status. The poet goes from the solitude of singularity to the company of a family structure: womb, consort, and progeny. The result is the poet's inspired emotions and thoughts ("[o] sentimento" [*the feeling*]; "[o] segredar do pensamento" [*the secrets that reason whispers*]), all of which constitute the stanza itself.

This self-referential simile conceives the stanza as an offspring, as the product of the story of a sexual union between the poet and a god. Inspiration is the action that makes the simile possible: literary creation is the result of a rhythmic respite inward, such as the inhalation and exhalation of intercourse. Like a nymph's orgasmic reaction to penetration and impregnation, the poet "[e]xpira de comção" [*expires out of commotion*], offering an etymological and symbolic depiction of the act of inspiration.

To embody the metaphor of a female figure that bears the seed of divinity, the poet acknowledges the need for a paradoxical transformation. If creative inspiration resembles the act and product of intercourse with a god, the poet too can mother excess, like a nymph, and within his mortal boundaries, he can bear something larger and more transcendental than himself. Not gratuitously, the poet describes his experience as a secretive communication that "excede a real | Natureza da minha alma" [*exceeds the real | Nature of my soul*]. Implicitly, this comparison alludes to the figure of the Virgin Mary, the woman who embodies the paradox of a mortal containment of God.⁶

Literary inspiration and its simile, the nymph's impregnation, are processes that transgress individuality under the logic that all *dramatis personae* are inherently fluid. The nymph and the mortal poet—both of whom are the offspring of a deity—are also the deity's reproductive partner and are thus mothers of God's other offspring. While the deity is a father, a grandfather, and a husband, the poet is simultaneously a son, a wife, and a mother.

⁶ MANGLAVITI (2000) further analyzes the relationship between the Virgin Mary, breath and inspiration, and poetic creation. Specifically, the author addresses the "world-mothering air" metaphor in Gerard Manley Hopkins' poem "The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe" (MANGLAVITI, 2000: 44). SANÍN also examines the relationship between the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary and poetic creation, conceiving pregnancy and writing as the result of a divine exhalation: "[Don Juan] quiere ser poeta y presiente que el artista debe feminizarse para crear. [...] intuye que para componer poemas [...] debe ser penetrado; que la inspiración es una posesión, y que la creación artística es gestación [...]; que debe ser inseminado y dar a luz si quiere que de él salga um poema" (2020: 69) [*Don Juan wants to be a poet and suspects that he must feminize himself in order to create. [...] He senses that if he wishes to write poems (...) he must be penetrated; that inspiration is a possession; and that artistic creation is pregnancy (...); that he must be inseminated and must give birth if he wants a poem to come out*]; then adding: "el ángel de la Anunciación, la alegoría de todas las inspiraciones" (SANÍN, 2020: 90) [*the angel of Annunciation: the allegory of all inspirations*].

This multidirectional configuration, both filial and affective, signals an early notice of Pessoa's ensuing *drama em gente*, the stage where the poet would disrupt the unidirectional and hierarchical structure of the author and the authored. For instance, Alberto Caeiro's both fictional and factual geneses are consistent with the notion of the poet's fluid roles, and the heteronym is both father and son. While Pessoa builds the myth of a Triumphal Day in April 1914 in which Caeiro, his master, allegedly "appears in" him (PESSOA, *apud* PIZARRO, 2017: 56), Caeiro's factual genesis is a long-lasting process:

There is one Caeiro who poses a synchronic challenge to us, [...]; and there is another one who challenges us diachronically as we try to track the process of his construction and his many voices against a timeline. [...] Reading Caeiro synchronically and diachronically, contrasting one view of a character to the view of many, can enrich our interpretation. This multiplicity is one of Fernando Pessoa's greatest achievements. We can read Caeiro as a canonized author; but we can also read him as a work in progress, constructed from what Pessoa wrote *qua* Caeiro and what Pessoa *qua* others said of their Master.

(PIZARRO, 2017: 68)

In *Portugal's* first canto, the poet's act of literary inspiration is based on an incestuous fantasy, which suggests that creation arises from the transgression of norms. There is a disruption, not only of family roles through incest, but of inter-generational procreation, threatening the logic of generational lineages and, ultimately, of the sequential passage of time. The feminized poet—who is both daughter and wife—is a testament to the disarrangement of time. By becoming the father's wife, the poet-nymph—i. e. the daughter—is also her own mother. Thus, the stanza is also a stance: literary creation is an erotic staging that, in its attempt to take control of time, dissolves the *dramatis personae* in a melodramatic fashion, revealing the incestuous identities of two forbidden lovers.

As seen in the following stanza, *Portugal's* third canto further explores the nature of the poet's impregnator. The father is the seed of this melodrama of fluid characters, and God himself is the primeval *dramatis persona* that contains all other characters onstage:⁷

⁷ *Portugal* proposes a logic in line with the *Book of Genesis*, which establishes a dramatic stage that is created by, and built in the image of, God himself. God's creation is his own mirroring manifestation. Therefore, the figure of the creator contains every character and prop onstage. *Genesis* develops the story of creation through a *mise en abyme* of separations (light from darkness, the earth from the heavens and the waters, mankind from animals, and man from woman). At the same time, *Genesis* is based on the notion that one enclosed stage (and character) contains infinite reproductions. The creation of vegetation reproduces this logic: "God said, 'Let the earth produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants, and fruit trees on earth, bearing fruit with their seed inside, each corresponding to its own species.' And so it was" (*New Jerusalem Bible*, Gn 1:11). Seeds allude to the embryonic potential of God, who carries within all ability to reproduce into his own future genealogy—i. e. God is the potential of infinite descent.

Espera e crê. A vida é o que cremos	[Await and believe. Life is what we believe
Nada sabemos, dolorosamente...	We know nothing, alas...
E Deus é o nome do que não sabemos,	And God is the name of what we don't know,
Do mysterio □ e immanente,	Of the □ and immanent mystery,
É o nome em que casamos os extremos	It is the name in which we tie both ends:
De saber e ignorar que a alma sente...	Knowing and ignoring that the soul feels...
Ao céu o olhar □ levantamos	To the heavens we raise our □ gaze
E sem rezar, sentimos que rezamos.	And even without praying, we can feel we are.]
(Pessoa, <i>apud</i> BARBOSA, PIZARRO, PITTELLA e SOUSA, 2020: 125-126; BNP, 11 ⁷ EN-60 ^v)	

In a riddle-like fashion, these first verses build a periphrastic description of God. The third verse defines God as “o nome do que não sabemos” [*the name of what we don't know*]. The concrete reference of this noun phrase (the name of the unknown) is indicated in the previous verse: “Nada” [*nothing*]. Therefore, the poet defines God through a contrived logic of transitivity: if God is the name of what we don't know, and what we don't know is everything (“Nada” [*nothing*]), therefore God is this very same nothingness.

The stanza problematizes the relationship between signifier and signified and hints at the idea that any attempt to theorize about the source of literary creation is comparable to the paradoxical attempt of defining God. The poet portrays God as a signifier that designates a unity—nothingness (or the name of what we don't know), yet this signifier is incompatible with its signified. God is the name that designates what, as unknown and thus unintelligible, cannot be designated. At the same time, the undesignated is a proper name, implying that the signifier is void of meaning precisely because it designates the void of nothingness.

As the encompassment of infinity, God's nothingness is also everything. This play on words, inherent to the grammatical double negative of various languages, including Portuguese, points at the paradoxical philosophy of enantiosemy⁸ that is present throughout Pessoaan literature and the literary avant-gardes⁹. The nothingness of what the poet ignores is the double negation of everything being unknown. What the stanza conveys is that the enantiosemic nature of the grammatical double negative (the fact that “nada” can mean both nothing and everything) encompasses the paradoxical nature of God. As an infinite being, God is a container of everything and, in its infinite containment, must also harbor nothingness.

⁸ Enantiosemy, also referred to as autonymy, is defined as the internal antonymy of a word: the possibility of a word to contain opposing meanings (e. g. the words “clip” or “peruse”, in English, which can mean “to cut off” or “to clasp, attach, or grip” and “to look over in detail” or “to look over in a cursory manner”, respectively. Enantiosemy is a dual and dialectical “arrangement of the objective reality itself” (MELIKYAN *et al.*, 2016: 128).

⁹ Pessoa proposes an exact enantiosemy throughout many of his writings. In “Tabacaria”, for instance, the poet argues: “Falhei em tudo. | Como não fiz propósito nenhum, talvez tudo fosse nada” (PESSOA, 2017: 256) [*I failed at everything. | Since I had no purpose, perhaps everything was nothing*].

To the poet, God is also “o nome em que casamos os extremos” [*the name in which we tie both ends*]. This spatialization of God, as a mappable and finite line, establishes a visual metaphor of the unknown and attempts to explain God in the terms of mortal time. If life is as much as the poet can aspire to believe he knows (“A vida é o que cremos” [*Life is what we believe*]), and God is the unknown as well as the juncture of opposite ends, this means God can be represented spatially in the terms of human lifetime: life is a mappable line that the poet is able to perceive, while God is everything that lies outside the poet’s scope of view, that is, the outside beyond the ends of the line.

That which remains unknown is, in the poet’s words, an immanent mystery. Once again, the poet implies a paradoxical view of perception while building a subtle metaphor for pregnancy. By equating God to an immanent mystery, Pessoa places God within the material, yet inaccessible, realm. Immanent, as opposed to transcendental, points to the idea that God is contained in an inner essence of his material creation.¹⁰

Like the impregnated poet of the first canto, the stanza in the third canto reasserts that God has penetrated the poet and nature as a whole. Like the offspring of an impregnated woman, the poet and nature’s inner presence remains mysterious and unseen. Though the poet contains God within, he is unable to grasp his meaning. The metaphor is achieved through the visual suggestion of such circular impossibility: though the poet’s life is a linear and mappable passage of time, which, by definition, contains a starting and an end point, the poet is unable to see both ends. Birth and death, though contained in mortal time, are unattainable to the mortal man, and are therefore manifestations of God within the poet’s material space and mortal time.

The belief in God’s immanent mystery is the basis of the poet’s faith and, therefore, works as a melodramatic trigger. As the following sections will argue, Portuguese *Modernismo* conceives faithfulness as a motif with both a religious and an affective-erotic connotation: the belief that, even when unseen, the loved one reciprocates the lover with unconditional and exclusive love.

An incestuous transgression: the son

Only five years later, and along with other authors, Fernando Pessoa would continue to explore poetic creation through affective terms. *Orpheu’s* first issue¹¹, in 1915, includes a series of literary works that depict melodramatic lyricism between poetic

¹⁰ “For Spinoza God is the immanent cause of all things” (LUCASH, 1994: 164).

¹¹ Portugal’s National Library (BNP) in Lisbon keeps a full digitized copy of *Orpheu’s* two published issues, along with additional documents (galley proofs of the unpublished third issue and letters from Mário de Sá-Carneiro). The digitized copy is located in the BNP digital collection RES. 2750 V.

voices and divinity—for instance, Mário de Sá-Carneiro's poems from *Indícios de Oiro* that appear in *Orpheu*, or Ronald de Carvalho's "A alma que passa", "O elogio dos repuxos", and "Reflexos".¹² *Orpheu* also reflects on the human and literary origin, that is, about the relationship with one's progenitor—as seen in Fernando Pessoa's *O Marinheiro*.¹³

Alfredo Pedro Guisado's thirteen sonnets also explore these motifs. One of Guisado's poems, "Ante Deus", depicts the poet's ability to impersonate God, while exhibiting the blurred identities of the members of the holy family. Guisado examines the inherent disruption in the three-pillar structure of father, mother, and son:¹⁴

Quando te vi eu fui o teu voar E desci Deus p'ra me encontrar em mim. Voei-me sôbre pontes de marfim – E uma das pontes, Deus, em meu olhar!	[Once I saw you I became your flight And I descended God to find myself in me. I flew myself over ivory bridges— And one of the bridges, God, before my eyes!
Aureolei-me de oiro em sombra fria E meus vôos caíram destruídos. Foram dedos de Deus os meus sentidos. Meu Corpo andou ao colo de Maria.	In a cold shadow I made myself a golden halo And my ruined flights collapsed. My senses were God's fingers. My Body stood on Mary's lap.
Agora durmo Cristo em véus pagãos. São tapetes de Deus as minhas mãos. Regresso Ansia p'ra alcançar os céus.	Now I sleep Christ in pagan veils. My hands are God's carpets. I come back Zeal to reach the heavens.

¹² Pessoa had a copy of Carvalho's 1913 *Luz Gloriosa* in his personal library. The book has Carvalho's handwritten dedication to Pessoa, who underlined—and drew upstrokes next to—a few verses that foretell *Orpheu*'s melodramatic lyricism. Underlined verses refer to love unions (e.g. "o casamento de Roberto e Martha" [*Roberto and Martha's wedding*], in "Rythmos Rusticos"; CARVALHO, 1913: 43); love separations (e.g. "e agoa-morta entre nós... e o caes... e a sombra e o Mundo..." [*and dead water between us... and the pier... and the shadow and the World*], in "Legenda"; CARVALHO, 1913: 87); and hyperbolic love (e.g. "E tu que eu não conheço e que me fazes | superior a mim mesmo [...] || [...] Saudade de um Amor que eu nunca tive" [*And you whom I don't know, you who make me | greater than myself (...) || (...) Longing of a Love I never had*], in "Lenda Triste"; CARVALHO, 1913: 110).

¹³ In Pessoa's static drama, three women discuss the origins of their words. When the third watcher says: "Minha irmã, não nos devieis ter contado essa historia. [...] Contaveis e eu tanto me distrahia que ouvia o sentido das vossas palavras e o seu som separadamente. E parecia-me que vós, e a vossa voz, e o sentido do que dizieis eram trez entes diferentes, como trez creaturas que fallam e andam" [*Sister, you should not have told us that story. [...] As you were telling it I was so distracted that I began to hear the meaning of your words apart from their sound. And it seemed to me that you, and your voice, and the sense of what you were saying were three different entities, like three creatures that speak and walk*]; the second one replies: "São realmente trez entes diferentes, com vida propria e real. Deus talvez saiba porquê... Ah, mas porque é que fallamos? Quem é que nos faz continuar fallando? Porque fallo eu sem querer fallar?" [*They really are three different entities, with a real life of their own. God might know why... Oh, but why do we speak? Who is making us speak? Why do I speak without intending to?*] (PESSOA, 1915: 37-38).

¹⁴ The interchangeability of roles in the lineage of God, Jesus, and the Virgin Mary resembles the mystery and simultaneity that lays the foundation of the dogma of the Holy Trinity. In turn, the Holy Trinity constitutes a model for further metaphors of three-pillar singular entities (GOODEY, 2019: 9).

Ergo-me mais. Sou o perfil da Dôr.
 Sôbre os ombros de Deus olho em redor
 E Deus não sabe qual de nós é Deus!

*I stand up straight. I am Pain's own contour.
 On God's shoulders I look around
 And God ignores which one of us is God!*

(GUISADO, 1915: 49)

"Ante Deus" establishes a mirroring relationship between the poet and God¹⁵. The opening verse alludes to a second person who is presumably God and, therefore, the poet himself. This relationship between the poet and the second person becomes both the poet's impersonation of God as well as an encounter with himself: "E descendi Deus p'ra me encontrar em mim" [*And I descended God to find myself in me*].

Throughout the first stanza, the poet fulfills the role of both the grammatical subject and object. He flies over himself and seeks to reach himself: "Voei-me sôbre pontes de marfim" [*I flew myself over ivory bridges*].¹⁶ At the same time, the poet overflies the bridges, one of which is said to be God. This fulfillment of multiple roles is achieved through the manipulation of verbs that, in a disruption of usage, are transformed into reflexives ("voei-me", "aureolei-me" [*I flew myself, I made myself a halo*]). This suggests how, at a grammatical level, language already acknowledges the fluidity of roles and the dramatic split of the self: a first person that can be both progeny (the agent that executes an action) and offspring (the object which the action turns back on).¹⁷

The second stanza introduces the figure of Mary in the affective family composition of mother and son: "Meu Corpo andou ao colo de Maria" [*My Body stood on Mary's lap*]. This verse further blends the poet with the figure of a God, now as a baby Jesus, reproducing the image of mother and child. The following stanza continues to blur the borders between the individuality of the poet and Christ by applying a forced transitivity into an intransitive verb: "Agora durmo Cristo em véus pagãos" [*Now I sleep Christ in pagan veils*].

¹⁵ See TIGERSTEDT (1968), who elaborates a literary genealogy that attempts to trace the origins of the metaphor of the poet as a godlike creator. This study encompasses authors like St. Augustine and Plato and argues that literary tradition draws heavily on Christian theology and classical philosophy to pursue the idea that the poet is a creator. At the same time, God's creation, the universe, "is often compared to a musical composition or song, or to a discourse, or, generally, to a perfect work of art, or even to a book, written by God, in which the creatures are the letters" (TIGERSTEDT, 1968: 467).

¹⁶ This portrayal of a blurred poet-God identity anticipates Fernando Pessoa's "Além-Deus", a series of five poems which were to be published in *Orpheu's* unsuccessful third issue, in 1916. The third poem, "A Voz de Deus", presents this dissolution: "Oh Universo, eu sou-te... [...] || [...] Mero eco de mim, me inundo | De ondas de negro lume | Em que para Deus me afundo" (PESSOA, 1984: 37) [*Oh, Universe, I am to you... (...) || A mere echo of myself, I inundate myself | In waves of black fire | Where I immerse myself into God*].

¹⁷ KOREPINA analyzes the symmetry of relations in reflexive constructions. As she explains: "Semantic reflexivity is a category of the sentence, because it reflects specific subject-object relationships, where a subject and object referent is partly or fully the same. A reflexive construction is one in which the subject and object refer to the same person or thing" (2018: 1).

The poet's growing transformation into God and Christ sheds light upon the paradoxical and transgressive premise of the Holy Trinity: the notion of an offspring that can be the parent of his own progeny, and, thus, his own father. "Ante Deus" indicates an inevitability of the incestuous quality of poetic creation: the poet's offspring—the work of art—is the result of a transgressive fluidity of family roles. The poet splits the self and creates out of an erotic relationship with himself, in the way that the Holy family is sustained on the notion that a son is also the parent and partner of his own mother.

An unfaithful love: the holy ghost

The release of *Contemporânea* in 1922 cements many of the literary motifs mentioned above. The first issue is strung together by texts and illustrations that portray a melodramatic proclivity and a need to conceive literary creation in religious and affective-erotic terms. For instance, Mário de Sá-Carneiro's ode to Paris, the magazine's initial poem, presents a city that he describes as "Regaço de namorada" [*Girlfriend's lap*] and "Consolo da viuvez | Sempre noiva da minh'Alma..." [*Widowhood's solace | My Soul's forever bride...*], leading up to a climactic erotic declaration: "— Quisera dormir contigo, | Ser todo a tua mulher!..." [*I would like to sleep with you, | To be, all of me, your woman!...*] (SÁ-CARNEIRO, 1922: 23-24). Similarly, António Botto's poem "[Podes levar as rosas que trouxeste]" [*You may take the roses you brought*] introduces the melodramatic voice of an unreciprocated love: "Nem me digas, | Que has de ser perpetuamente | O motivo mais ardente | — O maior motivo | Das minhas cantigas. || Enganámo-nos, meu bem! || Agora que já conheço | Todo o sabor dos teus beijos, | Quero-te menos" [*Don't tell me, | That you ought to be eternally | The most ardente motive | — The biggest motive | Of my songs. || We fooled ourselves, my love! || Now that I know | The taste of all your kisses, | I don't want you as much as I did before*] (BOTTO, 1922: 37).

To explain how *Contemporânea* blends these motifs, this final section will dissect some of the drawings by José de Almada Negreiros published throughout the issue. These illustrations are the expression of themes that are crosswise to the contents of the magazine: the redrawing of tradition, the eucharistic nature in the foundation of aesthetic movements, the erotic connotations of symbolic unions, and the relationship between the unseen and faith.

The cover page, illustrated by Almada, depicts a goblet and a flower from an upper perspective (see Fig. 1). As all goblets, this drinking vessel has no handles, but a foot, a stem, and a bowl-shaped cup. The rose also has a stem and an upper cup-shaped structure that, as in all flowers, supports the perianth (the outer floral structure). Almada's drawing presents an object (the goblet) that mirrors the structural components of the other object it contains (the rose). The cover of *Contemporânea* is an exercise of

duplication (a structure with its own repetition placed on top) and of analogy (roots, a stem, and a perianth are to flowers what a foot, a stem, and a cup are to goblets).

The goblet's preeminence in *Contemporânea*, as the cover page of an inaugural issue, suggests a link to the goblet *par excellence*: the antonomasia of the quintessential holy chalice. Symptomatically, "chalice" is also the name used to designate a flower's cup-shaped structure. Like the God portrayed in the *Book of Genesis*¹⁸, Almada proposes a *mise en abyme* of vessels: a chalice (the goblet) that contains another chalice (the rose), which, in turn, contains the potential of infinite chalices via the reproductive parts that it contains.

Almada's illustration raises the multiple meanings of the chalice but hides the object's inner lower half. Though we have no visible indication of any liquid inside the cup, the purpose of the chalice itself does suggest, at least in possibility, the presence of a liquid: water, wine, or the blood of Christ. The chalice is indicative of its own functionality, pointing at the possibility of a toast. An observer of this cover page might interpret the chalice—which bears the label *Contemporânea*—as an invitation to absorb the eponymous magazine, as if he were to drink its contents. While the illustration suggests ways in which reading may be comparable to the act of drinking, the portrayal of a chalice potentially filled with an unseen liquid is also analogous to the unseen contents of a magazine that the reader is yet to unveil. Like a religious believer, the reader is invited to drink what he is unable to see, that is, to execute an act of faith.



Fig. 1. Cover page of *Contemporânea* (1922)
by José de Almada Negreiros.

¹⁸ See footnote 7.

As a vessel that holds a rose, the chalice is also a vase. Symbolically, this vase contains femininity and, as the Christian chalice, purity. Almada suggests that a chalice's content, i. e. Christ's immaculate blood, is a ground—the soil and the water—where reproduction can potentially take place and where a seed can become a rose. Therefore, *Contemporânea's* chalice examines how a cup is also a fecund womb where progenitors meet, where impregnation takes place, and where reproduction can stem from.

The religious and erotic nuances are also visible in the overall geometry of Almada's composition, which depicts a cross-shaped union of a chalice and a rose¹⁹. The latter appears with its leaves wide open, creating a contour that mirrors a human shape with open arms, reminiscent of the posture of an embrace or a crucifixion. Additionally, the composition is surrounded by a radiance or a shadow, evocative of the aura and the nimbus associated with a deity's presence on Earth, or of the shade produced by a light illuminating the drawing from an upper perspective (a light that comes precisely from the position of the reader's gaze).

Other illustrations throughout the pages of *Contemporânea* establish a dialog with the themes suggested in Almada's cover. The artist's self-portrait, for instance, explicitly addresses eroticism and mirrors the magazine's proclivity toward the *mise en abyme* suggested by the chalice and the rose (see Fig. 2).

Like the objects on the cover page, Almada's portrait is drawn from an upper view. The body is dressed in a skin-tight garment that creates the illusion of nudity. The man sits down posing in the manner of an art model as if waiting to be sketched or as if he were in the middle of being drawn. In Baroque fashion, the pose suggests that this self-portrait is the prefiguration of another portrait, an ensuing croquis that is to be executed outside the limits of this illustration and finished at a future time. The existence of an unseen drawing that will come after this present, and visible, drawing points at a *mise en abyme* of sketches.

As all self-portraits do, Almada's drawing builds a spiral of mirrors where the figures of creator and creation merge. Almada—the artist and creator—models a creation in his own image—Almada the model—while elaborating a genetic mirror of the Christian god. It is noteworthy that, besides the cover page, this self-portrait

¹⁹ Throughout Almada's career in drawing and illustration, geometry becomes increasingly relevant, as analyzed by Pedro Freitas and Simão Palmeirim. They focus on the relevance of the artist's geometric corpus by the 1950s and 60s, and trace Almada's geometric philosophy to theoretical works in his personal library, such as *De divina proportione*, by Luca Pacioli, a work that "descreve várias propriedades matemáticas da divisão de um segmento em média e extrema razão – chamada de 'divina proporção' por Luca Pacioli, e, mais recentemente, 'secção de ouro' – associando-lhe alguns significados filosóficos e religiosos" (FREITAS, 2020: 285) [*describes various mathematical properties of a segment's division into mean and extreme ratio—called the 'divine proportion' by Luca Pacioli, and, more recently, 'golden section'—in association to various philosophical and religious meanings*].

is the magazine's first full-page illustration, indicative of the importance of this aesthetic of narcissistic eroticism throughout *Contemporânea*.

The idea of literary creation as an erotic encounter between the poet and God, as seen in *Portugal* and "Ante Deus", here gains an onanistic nuance. As another creator, the poet-artist gains a godlike ability to create in his image. In consequence, the encounter becomes a union of mirroring figures, and, as Almada's self-portrait indicates, artistic creation is achieved through a drama populated by eroticized characters who are all versions of the same self.

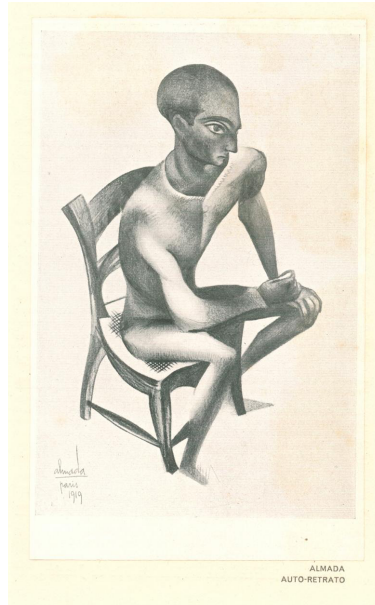


Fig. 2. Page 4 of *Contemporânea* (1922): self-portrait by José de Almada Negreiros.

Other moments in *Contemporânea* reiterate the concern of a Portuguese mythical spirit and national redemption, as explored by Pessoa in *Portugal*. Through the juxtaposition of verse and illustration, Almada's "Histoire du Portugal par coeur", a poem originally written in 1919, continues to explore the symbols and components of Lusitanian legacy²⁰. He does so through the use of the same religious and affective-erotic motifs hinted in *Portugal* and *Orpheu*.

In the initial page of the poem, Almada briefly suggests the relationship between literary creation, religiosity, and love: "Dédicace perpétuelle: A Toi, pour que tu ne crois que je vais le dédier a une autre" [*Perpetual dedication: To You, so you don't believe I will dedicate it to another woman*] (see Fig. 3).

²⁰ "A abordagem desenvolvida por Almada toma directrizes enunciadas num certo tom de elogio crítico, de objetivação sobretudo simbólica e mítica acerca dos temas afins à Cultura e História de Portugal" (LAMBERT, 2003: 14).

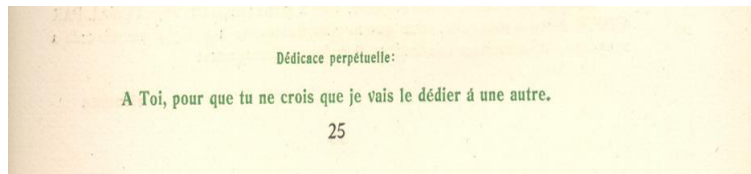


Fig. 3. Excerpt from page 25 of *Contemporânea* (1922): title page of "Histoire du Portugal par coeur" by José de Almada Negreiros

The dedication satirizes faithfulness by means of a circular—and, thus, perpetual—rhetoric. Almost tautologically, the poet implies he dedicates the poem to someone because he does not dedicate it to someone else. At the same time, the foolish logic reveals the opposite of a dedication, that is, a potential infidelity. Throughout the poem, Almada's illustrations reiterate the notion that family roles, romantic unions, and the temptation of both religious and affective-erotic infidelity are foundational elements of the Portuguese spirit, that is, of the poetic creation of Portugal. From the start, "Histoire du Portugal par coeur" frames poetic creation within the melodrama of a hinted love triangle.

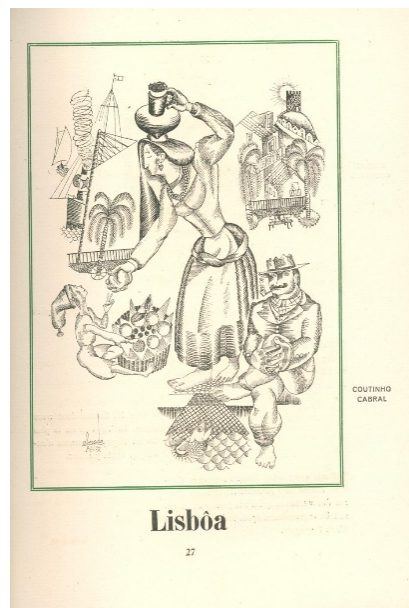


Fig. 4. Page 27 of *Contemporânea* (1922): drawing from "Histoire du Portugal par coeur" by José de Almada Negreiros.

The drawing associated with Lisbon, for instance, presents a triangular composition that mirrors the family structure of woman, man, and child (see Fig. 4). The woman occupies most of the page and divides the lower part of the illustration into two, each containing males. The woman is also proportionally larger than her counterparts, and her breasts, which are at the very center of the image, serve as a vantage point. The two sides of the triangular composition emerge from the vertex of the breasts: to the left, her arm leads to the child, and to the right, her torso and hip lead to the man.

The woman appears to be performing multiple tasks: she is walking, as indicated by the position of her feet; she carries a vessel on her head while maintaining enough balance to avoid dropping it; she appears bent sideways; and she is handing an object to the child. The woman divides the visual distribution of the composition as much as her movements are split into multiple actions, while also dividing her attention between two men: a child that receives it and an adult man who does not.

The lack of interaction between the woman and the man contrasts with the visual link between her and the child. In this triangular composition of characters whose sex and age are reminiscent of traditional family roles, the man's place is subverted. An intergenerational couple is formed (woman and child), whereas the man, a parody of a would-be king whose crown is a lesser spiked hat, sits uncoupled.

Throughout the rest of the poem, the association between romantic relationships, couples, and potential love triangles becomes increasingly present. Right after the Lisboa illustration, Almada inserts a drawing of a horse and a rider (see Fig. 5). The horse appears to be duplicated, a mechanism to portray movement in a way reminiscent of Muybridge's "Horse in Motion"²¹. This technique raises a question about the limitations of the depiction of movement—i.e. the depiction of space-time. At the same time, the duplicated horses reveal how the passage of time can be conceived as a constant split of individualities: one horse is also a multiplicity of countless horses that occupy infinite points in space-time.



Fig. 5. Excerpt from page 28 of *Contemporânea* (1922): drawing from "Histoire du Portugal par coeur" by José de Almada Negreiros.

²¹ "Muybridge's horse images marked the start of his increasingly sophisticated obsession with bodies of all kinds in motion. They made the world of motion visible, and in doing so reversed photography's preoccupation with extracting stillness from the chaos of the world. [...] Muybridge's ground-breaking photography can be linked to general transformations in the sense of movement that marked the nineteenth century. [...] In April 1830, the month of Muybridge's birth, [...] [h]uman mobility was limited by the velocities of horses, water, and wind. When Muybridge died in 1904 the earth was linked by a massive and intricate web of rail and steam [...]. The air too was about to be colonized [...]. The process of time and space compression was in full swing" (CRESSWELL; OTT, 2022: 18-19).

Though horse and rider are both technically in motion, only the horse is portrayed as two, while the rider remains one. The rider's unsplit shape tinges this character with a passive quality, implying that the effort and movement are actually coming from the horse. Yet, at the same time, the rider's unsplit shape reinforces the idea that only one man suffices to dominate the beast. The rider's feat is, thus, twice as worthy, since he exerts his power over a beast that seems to count as two. As a result, the couple of man and beast is also a triangle, a geometry of vertices where only one has control over the other two.

Ensuing depictions of couples become more explicitly romantic as "Histoire du Portugal par coeur" reaches its final pages. The illustration associated with Sintra depicts two couples in what seems to be two trite versions of a romantic date: a picnic and a boat ride (see Fig. 6).

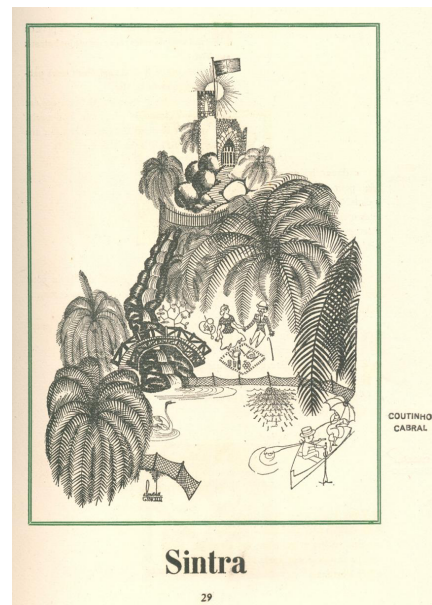


Fig. 6. Page 29 of *Contemporânea* (1922): drawing from "Histoire du Portugal par coeur" by José de Almada Negreiros.

The couples are enjoying the placidity of nature. They are inserted in a triangular composition of water, stones, and palm trees, which culminates in a mountain peak crowned by a stone castle, the sun, and a flag. Water is predominant: a river demarcates one side of the ground where the first couple sits down holding hands, while a lake—whose lack of strokes indicates the stillness of the water—occupies the lower section of the drawing. Overall, this is a top-down composition that leads the eye along the descending path of water. Atop, the flag and the sun lead to a stairway that, in turn, leads down to a cascade, whose plentiful strokes accentuate the effect of gravity as a signal of rapidly flowing water.

Ultimately, Almada's vertical composition leads the eye down to the merger and exchange of fluids: the river that blends into the lake. Almada includes a

surrounding fence but does not fully enclose the lake. He leaves a visual omission in the bottom right corner and, thus, pulls us into the water. According to the perspective of the illustration, no fence separates the couple on the boat from the perspective of the observer, suggesting that the reader of *Contemporânea* is in the lake as well, perhaps as a potential third vertex of these love triangles.

The increasing tension and blurred boundaries between two and three-piece compositions are ultimately expressed in the illustration of Almada's well-known "1+1=1" formula (see Fig. 7). This equation appears in the plays *Deseja-se Mulher* and *S.O.S.*, and, implicitly, across other works along several years and in different genres, in which the author continued to explore the philosophy of a multiple singleness. This formula encompasses the contradicting notion that mankind cannot achieve absolute oneness nor dismember its collective nature into a true multiplicity. In his 1932 conference "Direção Única", Almada states: "Todas as coisas se relacionam entre si" (ALMADA NEGREIROS, 2004: 169) [*Everything is related to everything*]; adding: "a mulher e o homem estão condenados à fatalidade da sua única unidade comum" (ALMADA NEGREIROS, 2004: 177) [*women and men are condemned to the fatality of their single common unity*].²²

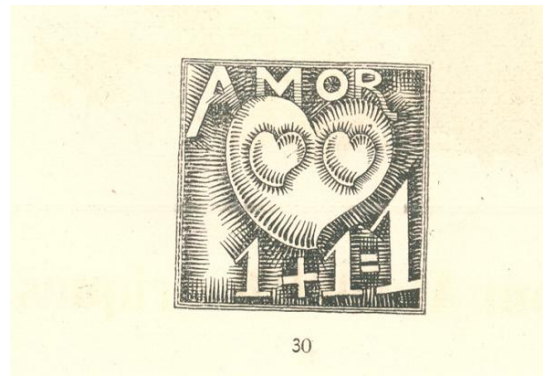


Fig. 7. Excerpt from page 30 of *Contemporânea* (1922): drawing from "Histoire du Portugal par coeur" by José de Almada Negreiros.

When compared to other instances in Almada's corpus, *Contemporânea's* version of the "1+1=1" axiom has two striking elements: the formula is depicted graphically, as one in a series of illustrations, and it is directly associated with love. Almada establishes a correspondence between the shapes and the numbers and he directly associates the components of the equation with a three-piece composition of hearts. Visually, the composition leads the observer to the same mathematical logic

²² Almada's formula also alludes to his criticism of the Portuguese spirit: "A unidade de Portugal como nação devia cumprir-se em cinco parcelas singulares, interrelacionadas entre si, sem prejuízo de sua autonomia e identidade: o indivíduo como pessoa humana; a colectividade portuguesa; civilização peninsular ibérica; a Europa e o Universo" (LAMBERT, 2003: 21) [*Portugal's unity as a nation had to be achieved in five singular and, regardless of their autonomy and identity, interrelated pillars: the individual as a human person, the Portuguese collectivity; the Iberian peninsular civilization; Europe, and the Universe*].

of the addition equation: the factors ("1+1") are contained in the result ("=1"), as well as the two smaller hearts are contained in the third larger heart. The formula itself is also graphically enhanced, so as to convey the notion that the result is larger than the factors, with the third number drawn at a larger scale than the previous two.

These four illustrations from "*Histoire du Portugal par coeur*" (the woman, the man, and the child; the two-horse rider; the picnic and boat couples; and the 1+1 love formula) depict relational tensions between individuals. The drawings show how oneness is subject to duplication, while both oneness and duplication, in turn, form potential systems of three-pillar relationships. Additionally, these images foretell the religious logic with which these authors attempt to rebuild, through aesthetic terms, the alleged history of the Portuguese nation. This religious logic alludes to the tension of the Christian triple identity in the Holy Trinity, as the basis for the primeval love relationship of a believer: faithfulness toward a single three-piece composition.

One of the final drawings in "*Histoire du Portugal par coeur*", which is labeled after Dom Afonso Henriques, includes a banner that identifies the specific context of this depiction: the Battle of Ourique (see Fig. 8). The illustration portrays a warrior, the King, in a combat position, as if he were about to thrust his sword at an enemy. The warrior appears in full armor and his enlarged proportion occupies almost three fourths of the composition. At a smaller scale, the illustration also depicts Afonso Henriques' coat of arms (which has ever since been part of the Portuguese coat of arms) and a figure of Christ, also in combat and holding a sword, next to a cascade of what appears to be bodies of defeated enemies.

The coat of arms and the figure of Christ are separated by the warrior's thigh and bent knee. This division serves as a mirror: above, the crucified son in the role of a warrior; below, the coat of arms inspired by the crucified son and composed of a cross with five smaller escutcheons.²³

The composition depicts the foundation of the Kingdom of Portugal. By doing so, Almada's illustration emblazons this historical event as an act of faith. Christ the warrior stands triumphant next to the bodies of the infidels, those unfaithful to his love, while the larger warrior—the Christian King—pleads allegiance to a Christ depicted, not gratuitously, next to his heart. In this orgy of defeated infidels, the cuckolds—the couple of the King and his mirroring Christ—brandish their swords, which stand erect after the punishment—a massacre—against nonreciprocal love.

²³ The composition of the five escutcheons is meant to represent Afonso Henriques' wounds in the Battle of Ourique, which, according to the legend, mirror the Five Holy Wounds that Christ suffered during his crucifixion. The so-called "miracle of Ourique" is the propagated thesis that Afonso Henriques' triumph in the Battle of Ourique (1139) is not only "the key event in the foundation of nationality" but also the "greatest victory ever gained by a Christian king" as a result of "the legendary apparition of Christ to the first Portuguese king, Afonso Henriques" (MATOS, 1997: 68-69).

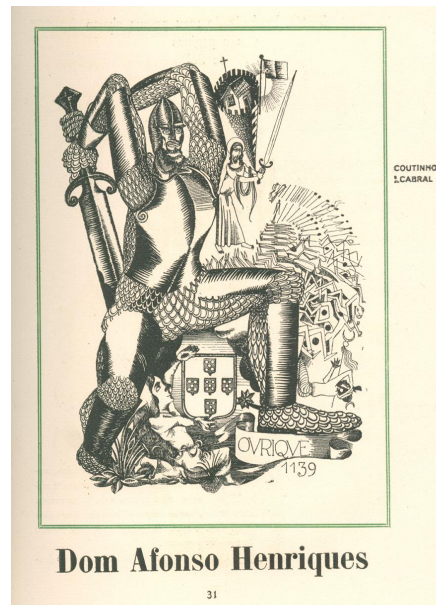


Fig. 8. Page 31 of *Contemporânea* (1922): drawing from “*Histoire du Portugal par coeur*” by José de Almada Negreiros.

Contemporânea depicts poetic creation as a metaphor for the relationship between the Christian believer and the Holy Ghost. The poet and the artist’s creative process is, thus, a definition of faith: while it mirrors the temptation of religious and erotic infidelity, poetic creation is also based on a logic of faithfulness in the unseen—i. e. in the invisible manifestation of God’s Holy Ghost.

Authors like Fernando Pessoa, Alfredo Pedro Guisado, and José de Almada Negreiros draw heavily from religious and erotic images as metaphors for the poet’s relationship to creation. These writers elaborate parallelisms that stage a melodrama of the self: a multi-party structure of lovers and family members that unite, inspire, inseminate, betray, and remain faithful to each other. By no means is this a pattern that originated in *Contemporânea*, let alone *Orpheu* or early-twentieth-century poetic and dramatic production. Portuguese authors elaborate this metaphor as evidence of a literary awareness: their craft is inescapably framed in a history of religious dramas. Therefore, authors like Pessoa, Guisado and Almada Negreiros depict poetic creation as a drama that tradition has rewritten once and again, in a stage where the poet is the Prometheus and the Icarus who will forever attempt to impersonate the father—and the impregnated lover—of himself.

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