



Henrique de Senna Fernandes. Photo Miguel de Senna Fernandes.

Politics, Patriarchy, Progress and Postcoloniality

The Life in the Fiction of Henrique de Senna Fernandes

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Henrique de Senna Fernandes, whose death in 2010 was widely mourned among those familiar with the cultural and intellectual life of Macao, cut a unique figure in the field of global lusophone literature. He was the most prolific and representative writer in his native city. Most poetry and fiction set in Macao and published during the 1980s and 1990s was the work of expatriate Portuguese writers who resided in the territory for greater or lesser periods of time. Fernandes was a 'filho da terra', a native son of Macao, and therefore held a particular iconic status. His name is inextricably linked to the city he loved, much as Jorge Amado's will always be associated with Salvador, in Brazil. He was born in 1923 into an old Macanese family, whose roots originated in Portugal, Goa and, of course, China, and whose recorded presence in the territory went back at least two centuries. He belonged to a literary generation of Macanese intellectuals who emerged during the 1950s, more or less contemporaneous to similar groupings elsewhere in the Portuguese colonies, all of whom were influenced to some extent, and indirectly, by Brazilian regionalism, in wishing to depict the reality of their homeland and evoke its social and cultural traditions. What made Senna Fernandes unique among

his generation was the fact that he was old enough to have grown up and witnessed life in Macao in the pre-war years of the 1930s, to have reached adulthood during the harsh years of the Japanese occupation of China and its effect on Macao, and then to experience the political volatility of the 1960s, the Portuguese Revolution of 1974 and its effect on Macao, the handover years, and even the first decade of the Macao Special Administrative Region.¹ As a lawyer, school teacher, and collaborator in the Macao press over the years, it is tempting to see similarities between Senna Fernandes and the Cape Verdean writer, Baltazar Lopes, for both left to study for a university degree in Portugal but then returned to their native colonial territories to play important roles in the cultural life of Macao and Cape Verde respectively.

Fernandes's first published work was the short story, 'A-Chan, a Tancareira', which won a student prize at Coimbra in 1950. He continued to write short stories, which were eventually assembled and published by the author in 1978, under the title of *Nam Van: Contos de Macau*. The timing of this was significant, for in the late 1970s considerable attention was being paid in Portugal to the emergent literatures of the lusophone African countries, and it is highly probable that Fernandes wanted to



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give a literary voice to Macao. Two novels followed: *Amor e Dedinhos de Pé*, in 1986, and perhaps his best known work, *A Trança Feiticeira*, in 1992. Both these novels were turned into films, a development that not only gave his work an extra dimension in terms of its reception, but perhaps reflected the fact that Fernandes was a keen cinema goer and was even a film critic for the Portuguese-language press in Macao. The idea that literature should entertain through the twists and turns in its narrative owes a lot, in Fernandes's writing, to his familiarity with the great popular films of the Hollywood era. In 1998, a further collection of stories and memoirs of old Macao was published under the title of *Mong-Há*. Thereafter, Fernandes continued to write. His novel, *A Noite Desceu em Dezembro*, partly published in feuilleton form for the Macao weekly, *Ponto Final* in 2005, to commemorate five years since the handover, was virtually ready for publication by the time of the author's death, and there were a number of other unfinished texts.

Many of Fernandes's so-called 'contos' (short stories) are in fact novellas, and in most of these a first-person narrator is embedded in the text as the recounter of a tale that was told him, or that was somehow well-known among the Macanese community. Much of his work is set either on the eve of or during the War of the Pacific, a period which is often recalled many years later. In this way, Fernandes the fiction writer meshes with the memorialist and chronicler of bygone Macao. It is no coincidence that the author was a history teacher, and as a writer felt a need to communicate to a younger generation of Macanese something of Macao's near past before it was forgotten. Nowhere is this more apparent than in his memoirs that use a particular local landmark, such as 'Rua das Mariazinhas', or an institution, such as 'Hotel Riviera' or the 'Grémio Militar', all of which can be found in *Mong-Há*, as points of departure for Fernandes to remember his childhood or youth,



and the changes that have occurred in these various locations of Macao, as measured across his lifetime.

POLITICS

Within the broad field of postcolonial studies, the experience of small territories that are incrustations on much larger national units, territories such as Macao and Hong Kong, or even Singapore, cannot be easily compared with the vast colonial expanses of Africa, America, or even south-east Asia, that were incorporated into the empires of western European countries between the 16th and 19th centuries. These micro-territories were founded upon trans-oceanic trade, and were essentially city states in all but name. In the case of Macao and Hong Kong, their future was inextricably linked to China. The vast majority of their resident population originated in the Chinese mainland, and in the course of time increasingly produced the commercial élite of the territories. In Macao, the small mixed, creole population of Macanese who, in another colonial situation, would have produced the contestants to colonial rule and eventual local nationalists, tended to identify with the colonial status quo, or with their 'Portuguese capital', in the words of Pina Cabral (1993). Emotionally, however, they were usually conscious that their cultural umbilical cord was firmly tied to the land of their birth. As Senna Fernandes himself put it: 'Consideramos Portugal como Pátria e Macao como Mãria. É a razão de sermos diferentes. Macao representa todos os macaenses' (Lemos and Yao Jingming, 2004).

If the Macanese were both Portuguese and oriental, they served as intermediaries between their colonial administrators and the Chinese officials and traders. They transited between two cultural communities, and this role is plainly seen in some of Fernandes's work. Adozindo, for example, the Macanese hero of *A Trança Feiticeira* begins his process of social and moral redemption by taking the only job open to him, which is to work for a Chinese trader. Adozindo's knowledge of both Portuguese and spoken Cantonese enables him to represent his employer before Portuguese officialdom and the harbour authorities.

Elsewhere, the idea of the Macanese as natural reconciliators, is illustrated most poignantly by his first person narrator in the story, 'Ódio Velho não Dorme'. It is a tale of school friendships in Macao in the 1930s.

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Júlio, the awkward son of a Portuguese father who is in prison, is ritually humiliated and despised by most of his classmates, chiefly the rich metropolitan boy, Heitor, and even more so by Fernando, the son of an élite administrator briefly stationed in the territory. Only the Macanese narrator shows Júlio any friendship and solidarity, even though this is often tinged with scorn, as he tries to maintain the friendship of Heitor and Fernando, which he clearly values more in view of its spurious prestige. The three Portuguese return to their homeland before the outbreak of war, and it is not until after the end of the conflict that the Macanese narrator can continue his studies at university in Portugal. One of the first people he tries to contact upon arrival in Lisbon is Heitor, who demonstrates little interest in re-assuming their friendship and leaves his old classmate offended and disillusioned by his distant and patronising attitude. The problem is that Heitor frequents sophisticated literary circles and is involved in politics against the regime. The narrator, perhaps Fernandes's alter ego, self-confesses his ignorance of fashionable literary currents, and has had no time to engage with any political movements, coming as he does from a Macao that is recovering from the proximity of war and facing a real revolution on its doorstep. The narrator thus develops a deep resentment of the Lisbon intellectuals, but this is no different from the type of irritation on the part of a provincial against the chattering classes of any capital city. It is when he re-encounters Júlio on a much later trip back to Lisbon in the 1960s that we obtain a fuller picture, not so much of Fernandes's political position towards the colonial regime, for that is immaterial, but where his Macanese character aligns himself among his old school friends, who have gone their separate ways. Júlio has made his career in the colonies and is now a powerful figure in the Overseas Ministry, capable of dispensing favours or frustrating aspirations. Persuaded by a cousin, who

is waiting for a request to be granted over a business deal in Angola, to approach his former school friend, the apprehensive narrator is warmly welcomed by Júlio, who immediately recalls him as the only school friend he had. Not only do we learn that Júlio is a self-made man, the type of creature the regime allowed a certain degree of power, but that he has used this power to ruin the lives of both Heitor and Fernando, and it is at this point that the narrator understands the extent to which Júlio's position in life has been achieved in large measure through his hatred for those who had humiliated him at school.

Ultimately, the narrator does not let his concerns about Júlio's twisted mind detract from his affection for him: 'Com todos os cinzentos da sua personalidade, Júlio foi sempre bom para mim e acabei por gostar dele' (*Mong-Há*: 212). Perhaps, too, it is Júlio's resilience, as he survives the 1974 Revolution, and joins democratic politics, that appeals to the narrator. Maybe his Macanese pragmatism has more in common with Júlio's struggle for survival than it does with the ideological pursuits of Heitor, in that they are both survivors during periods of political turmoil, and both know what it is like to have one's pride damaged. On the other hand, if Júlio meets a violent end, it is because of his tragic misinterpretation of the power of love and his all-consuming hatred of others who have

Henrique de Senna Fernandes in his office, c. 2001.



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humiliated him, themes the significance of which we shall return to later.

PATRIARCHY

On various occasions throughout his work, Fernandes refers to the 1920s and 1930s as being the halcyon era for Macanese patriarchal society, when families still maintained their cohesion, and continued to preserve time-honoured customs and habits centred around the Church, the parish, social institutions, family festivities, excursions to the beach, or through the border gate or across the Inner Harbour to the 'terra-china' (Chinese territory). It was the uninterrupted calendar of such habits that Fernandes recalled with affection, and which nurtured the Macanese sense of identity of the generation he was born into. Yet the author tempers his nostalgia for a past age with a satirical portrayal of the very society he evokes through memory. What interests Fernandes, perhaps more than anything, is how society ultimately adapts to modernity and the need for change, while not tampering too much with the social order. Wide-scale change, of course, was foisted upon traditional Macanese families by the War of the Pacific, for in spite of Macao's neutrality (or precisely because of it), the territory received a flood of refugees fleeing the Japanese occupation of large parts of China, the foreign concessions, and neighbouring Hong Kong. Large numbers of Chinese swelled the ranks of the destitute, Portuguese citizens from Hong Kong and Shanghai brought with them more modern ideas of social relationships. These Portuguese citizens were, of course, members of the Macanese diaspora, and their effect on the moral values and petty hypocrisies of the homeland Macanese patriarchy is evoked in the novella, 'Candy', and in Fernandes's most recent novel, *A Noite Caiu em Dezembro*.

The gender roles ascribed to characters in his novels and stories generally conform to what might traditionally be expected. Men are ultimately, and desirably, the providers and begetters of families, while women reign supreme as home makers. For patriarchy to be modified, however, these gender roles have to oscillate and even be thrown into reverse, before being reassumed in a more liberal way. Thus, Victorina, the heroine of *Amor e Dedinhos de Pé*, rescues Chico Frontaria from his moral and physical decline, and by using her skills as a nurse and the inheritor

of her grandfather's expertise in Chinese medicine, helps re-infuse him with dignity and self-worth, as a result of which he becomes a responsible male. The two, who are both outcasts in their own way, and exiles from patriarchy, marry and raise a family. A similar pattern is repeated in *A Trança Feiticeira*: the beautiful Chinese water seller, A-Leng, and her spoilt Macanese beau, Adozindo, are expelled from their respective communities. A-Leng shows initiative and leadership when Adozindo is at his weakest after he has been banished by his father. Once Adozindo completes his moral regeneration, A-Leng becomes home maker and housewife, while Adozindo reclaims his traditional gender role. In both novels, there is a final reconciliation with the society that has ostracised the heroes, but the emphasis is on this being a reward that has been merited. By the same token, harmony is not regained in those relationships in which the traditional gender roles are not re-asserted, such as in the marriage between the flunky, Florêncio, and Adozindo's previous mistress, the rich Lucrecia (*A Trança Feiticeira*), and between Hipólito Vidal and Cesaltina (*Amor e Dedinhos de Pé*). The suggestion is that these relationships are not founded on true love and instinctive respect for conventional gender roles. Interestingly, both female characters are in thrall to previous patriarchs: Lucrecia to her late husband, the wealthy Santerra who had saved her from poverty, and Cesaltina to her father, the tyrannical and manipulative Padilla. Lucrecia preserves a tight grip on the financial interests she has inherited, using Florêncio merely as a legal stud, and Vidal fails to impose himself over his father-in-law as the dominant male in the household, until he finally breaks free with the help of his godfather, a bohemian outcast from conservative society, and abandons the family for Shanghai, where he begins his process of redemption.

At this point, it is probably useful to consider the work of Doris Sommer, and her analysis of what she terms the foundational fiction of Latin America, to help us place the fiction of Fernandes in Macao in its appropriate context. The focus of Sommer's study are the domestic romances that emerged in Latin America during the middle decades of the 19th century, partly in response to the influences of European romanticism, but which took on a life of their own and a particular local significance within the context of the need felt by writers in that part of the world to evoke a

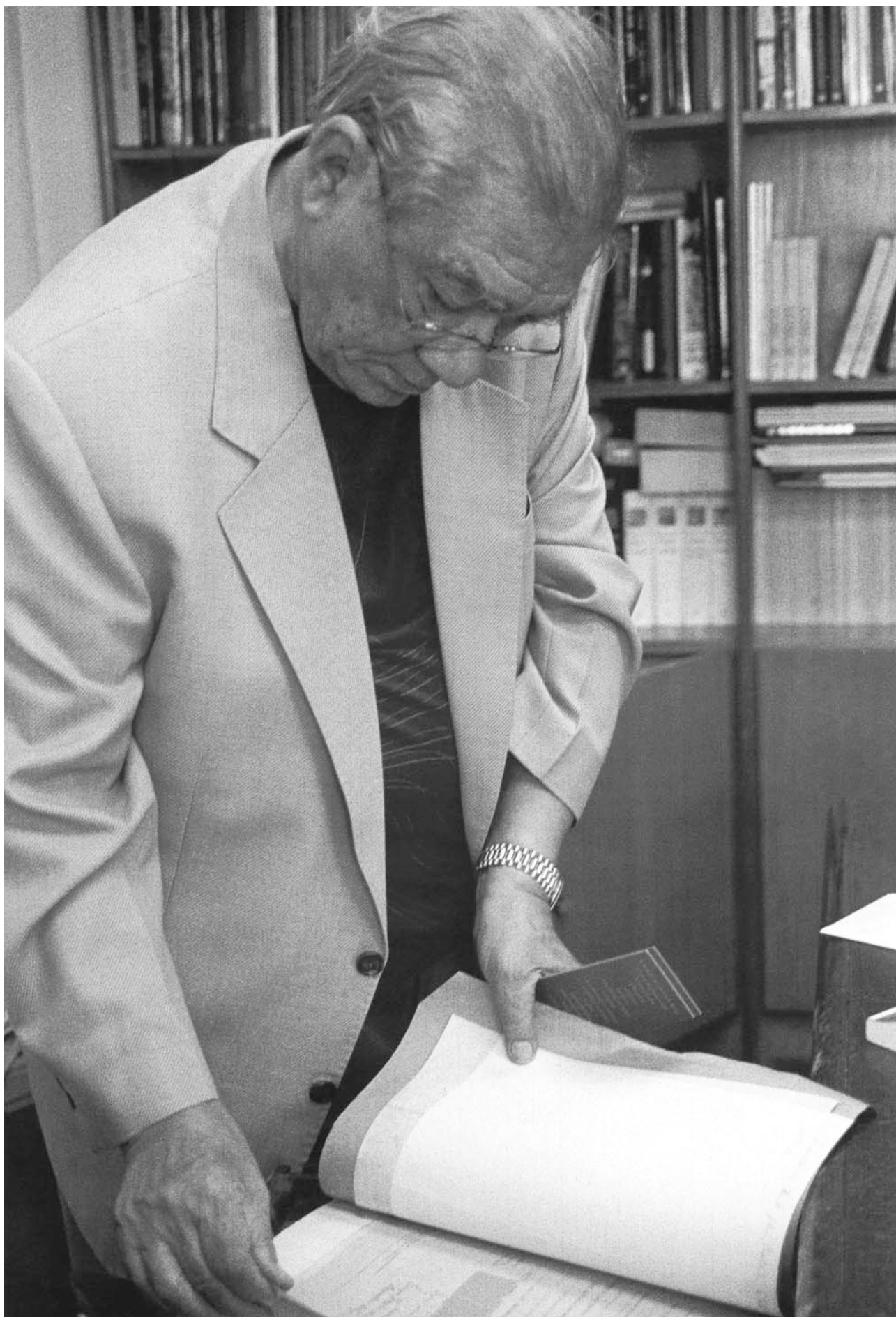


Photo Lúcia Lemos.

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sense of nation building, to write a literature of national identity that differentiated their cultures from those of the former Iberian metropolises. According to Sommer, the way they did this was to improve on their European models by overcoming the problematic nature of romantic love and turning it into a productive act, with social and political implications (Sommer, 1993: 16). So the domestic romances of the middle of the 19th century are examples of a genre in which the erotic drives social and political desire, educating the emerging bourgeoisie in a set of liberal values, in which opposites could be reconciled in the name of patriotism and an emerging national identity. In the literature of Brazil, these

domestic romances are spearheaded by the Indianist, historical novels of José de Alencar such as *O Guarani* (1857) and *Iracema* (1865), in which noble Indian natives coupled with noble European colonisers to form the first Brazilians, or in the fiction of Bernardo Guimarães, in particular his anti-slavery best seller, *A Escrava Isaura* (1875), in which an unjustly enslaved quadroon beauty is saved and freed by her noble, white, liberal sweetheart.²

Alencar, Bernardo Guimarães and other Brazilian romantics were to be roundly parodied by later generations of writers who emerged during the irreverent Modernist revolution of the 1920s, but perhaps we have to see the Fernandes project in Macao, as evinced in his two published novels, but also in some of his short stories, in the same light as the domestic romances of 19th-century Latin America. To support this idea, it is now appropriate to look at models and examples that might have had a bearing on Fernandes, who began to publish regularly in the final decades of the Portuguese administration. The 1960s had witnessed



In the early 1950's, student at the University of Coimbra.

the publication of two anglophone novels, one of which, James Clavell's *Tai-Pan*, was one in a series of international blockbusters about European contact with East Asia by the same author. *Tai-Pan*, first published in 1966, is a fictional reconstruction of the foundation of Hong Kong as a British colony, and its undoubted heroes are Dirk Struan, a Scottish privateer, smuggler and free trader, and founding father of the trading company that is loosely based on Jardine-Matheson, and Mei-Mei, his Chinese mistress. We have, then, two outsiders: Struan, from the British periphery, who is prepared to diverge from British imperial officialdom in the interests of free trade, and adopts Chinese cultural

habits in order to integrate, and Mei-Mei, a one-time courtesan who, while never losing her own Chinese identity, nevertheless adopts some of Struan's habits, including his Scottish speech patterns. We have the same type of cultural intermeshing that Fernandes was to illustrate so effectively in *A França Feiticeira* nearly 30 years later.

A year after the publication of Clavell's bestseller, Austin Coates's historical novel, *City of Broken Promises* was first published. Once again, the focus is on the romantic liaison between two characters who are, in some way, marginal, or have become marginalised from colonial society or the institutions which uphold it: on the one hand, we have Thomas van Mierop, a functionary of the British East India Company, who falls foul of his colonial monopoly company because of his anti-opium stance, on the other, his Chinese mistress, Martha, a rags-to-riches orphan, whom Thomas eventually marries on his deathbed, enabling her, with considerable shrewdness on her part, to become Macao's first native shipowner, and a

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trader in her own right. If these two historical novels have one feature in common, it is through their main protagonists, who steadfastly contest conventional colonial hierarchy and monopoly. Fittingly, both were published during the Chinese cultural revolution, which spilled over into both Hong Kong and Macao, possibly to remind readers of the foundational *raison d'être* of these two port cities as international and cosmopolitan trading emporia at a time when their status seemed to come under political threat. They implicitly uphold the ideals of 19th-century liberalism: free trade, individual initiative and the democratic pursuit of wealth and profit. The erotic attraction between Struan and Mei-Mei, and Thomas and Martha, suggests a kind of reconciliation between Europe and China, a wedding of essences between European, and specifically British liberalism and Chinese resilience and industriousness, that further justify the existence of Hong Kong and Macao as independent portals through which to channel trade into and out of China. In this sense, they might be considered domestic romances, recalling to some extent at least Sommer's foundational fictions of Latin America a century before.

A quarter of a century after the publication of these two novels, during which time Clavell, of course, had written further bestsellers, adding to his saga about the Struans and their rivals, Henrique de Senna Fernandes emerged as the doyen of Macanese literature. As we have seen, he had begun his writing career in the 1950s, but the publication of his two novels in 1986 and 1992 seemed to mark the emergence of a clear project in his literary priorities, which had only been hinted at in earlier tales, and that is the tendency to focus on the happy outcome to a story, the jettisoning of unproductive or failed relationships. The writer's first short story, 'A-Chan, a Tancareira' was well within the mould of the neo-realism of the 1940s and 1950s in its depiction of poverty and abandonment as being one of the reasons why the young Chinese orphan girl falls in love with a Portuguese sailor, who is stuck in Macao during the War of the Pacific. When the war ends, Manuel's wanderlust gets the better of him, and he returns to Portugal, taking their baby daughter with him in order to protect her from an unenviable future as a prostitute. In his last collection of stories, *Mong-Há*, 'Milagre de Natal' is an apparent repeat of this situation, albeit at a slightly higher social level: a Macanese orphan girl falls in love with a Portuguese army officer.

They embark on an affair, she falls pregnant, and he is recalled to Portugal. However, in this case, he returns some years later. The absent father's crisis of conscience makes him return to Macao in order to take up his paternal and family responsibilities. The conundrum bequeathed by Fernandes's first tale is resolved in his later Christmas miracle.

Fernandes's masterpiece in the short story genre, 'Candy', is another tale of a failed relationship. Candy is a Hong Kong Portuguese refugee in Macao during the war years. Poverty, orphanhood, and an implied experience of rape at the hands of Japanese soldiers, have all hardened her to the world of social relationships and romance. She engages in a liaison with a Macanese boy, the narrator, but drops him for a Filipino, who promises her riches, but soon abandons her. After the war, she finds a job in a British firm, and eventually marries her English boss, Morris-White, thus gaining entry into high society in colonial Hong Kong. A chance meeting with her former Macanese lover 24 years after she last saw him, confirms, in the climax to the story, that the child she conceived as a result of a last encounter with him, immediately prior to his departure to Brazil, was given up for adoption. The author's suggestion is that by forfeiting her Macanese cultural identity and family network, and devoting her life to assimilating into British colonial culture, she has become a prisoner in a gilded cage. Even her children have lost any outward appearance of their mother's physical ancestry. If this is Candy's punishment for having embarked on a marriage not based in the primacy of erotic appeal, Fernandes's later story, 'Yasmine' (*Mong-Há*: 233-273), shows a British protagonist in a bizarrely unproductive relationship, as if, perhaps, to gently punish Morris-White, from 'Candy', for his British imperial prepotence. Once again, the first-person narrator is a Macanese, who has been befriended by John Bradley, a British visitor from Hong Kong, whose prime obsession is his collection of oriental snuff boxes. It is while searching for these, that he has dealings with a shadowy Bombay businessman, Ismail, and his beautiful female companion, Yasmine, for whom Bradley develops a passion that soon eclipses that which he devotes to his snuff boxes. When he discovers that the relationship between Ismail and Yasmine is one of abuse and quasi-enslavement, he decides to save her. Just as he believes he is about to achieve this, Yasmine disappears, not before confiding to the narrator, Bradley's Macanese friend, that she is in fact a man. Here then, the gender

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The school teacher with some of his students, c. 1960

identities so clearly delineated in his stories and novels, are blurred in what could be seen as a concealed homosexual attraction between the Englishman and the erstwhile Yasmine. It is paradoxically a tale of true love, but one that can never, by its very nature, be productive in ensuring procreation and thus continuity, which, as already mentioned, seems to be the motivating force of love for Fernandes.

The same could be said for ‘Desforra dum China Rico’, in which gender stereotypes are equally muddled and, as in ‘Yasmine’, encased in orientalist stereotypes. Pou In, the daughter of an elite family that has fallen on hard times, and Cheong, the son of an upwardly mobile entrepreneur, are the participants in an arranged marriage between two families in Canton. The coupling is therefore not the product of erotic attraction, and this spells disaster. Pou In admires her gruff father-in-law, but despises her unassuming husband, and while their marriage is biologically productive, their offspring are not the product of a loving relationship. Pou In embarks on an affair with Wong, a Chinese opera actor, an expert across the whole range of gender roles:

Versátil, tanto representava o papel de imperador, como de general e de mandarim. Era imitável na personificação dum eunuco. Mas excedia-se na encarnação de personagens femininas. Doseava com extremo talento a fragilidade dum virgem

abandonada com a sensualidade felina dum mulher que conhece o poder da sua beleza (*Nam Van*: 115-116).

This feminised Casanova comes to dominate Pou In, fleeces her, abuses her, and even moves into the family compound while the husband is away. As Cheong is gradually made aware of his humiliation at the hands of a rival of dubious masculinity, he begins a process of redemption, finally assuming his role as the alpha male. Significantly, he modernises his father’s business, taking it away from provincial Canton, and tapping into the great international markets of Shanghai and Hong Kong. Eventually, he prepares his revenge with sinister thoroughness, removing Pou In’s children to Macao, while homing in on the two lovers and arranging for them to be contaminated with leprosy. Abandoning his wife and lover to their terrible stigma and fate, he closes down his residence and moves to Shanghai, then Hong Kong, and finally Macao with his new companion, the faithful family slave, A-Yeng, who has been secretly in love with him all along. Cheong’s progress into capitalist modernity is therefore achieved at a terrible price of humiliation and ritual vengeance, which leaves the young Macanese narrator horrified at the story he has heard one night, on the ferry between Canton and Macao.

Equally chilling is the outcome of the already discussed ‘Ódio Velho não Dorme’, the story of Júlio’s

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revenge against Fernando for the humiliations visited upon him during their school days in Macao, for while he manages to humiliate the object of his hatred in return, and steal his fiancée from him, his marriage is a loveless one, protected only by the patina of social convention and convenience. When all three of them die in a car accident, it is clear that Júlio had not managed to shatter the love between his wife and her former fiancé, but had caught them trying to elope together. In Fernandes's world, then, humiliation can have negative consequences on a person's morality, but positive outcomes if it leads to some sort of social redemption. However, for this to happen, it requires a restoration through love of traditional gender roles, with the male as provider, the female as home maker and the upholder of family cohesion, and the two drawn together through erotic attraction rather than social and economic self-interest. This explains the moral message of a story like, 'Chá com Essência de Cereja', in which true love prevails against all odds between Maurício, a poor Macanese orphan, and a poor Chinese orphan girl, Yao-Man. It also explains the moral and social redemptions of the heroes and heroines of his two novels, *Amor e Dedinhos de Pé* and *A Trança Feiticeira*. If Maurício becomes a successful international businessman, Chico Frontaria re-integrates into his family circle, and Adozindo comes to the rescue of his father's ailing firm, these happy conclusions to some extent mirror the democratic, free-enterprise values suggested in all Clavell's novels. The crucial difference between these two authors is that Clavell foregrounds empire building. The epigraph in his novel, *Noble House* (1981), with its dedication to 'Her Britannic Majesty's administration in Hong Kong', leaves little doubt regarding Clavell's sympathies (significantly, the novel was published in the lead-up to talks between Britain and China over the future of the territory). In contrast, where characters of mixed descent play subordinate roles in Clavell's work, they are centre stage in Fernandes's fiction. They have little or no interest in Portuguese politics, and make no mention of Portugal's colonial role. Moreover, Adozindo consciously avoids the governor's circle even after his reintegration into society. The productive romances depicted by Fernandes involve either Macanese partners, or Macanese and Chinese. But perhaps the most significant intervention by the author, upon Adozindo's re-acceptance by his own community, is

that he and A-Leng 'seriam sempre rebeldes, porque independentes dos cânones estritos de dois mundos' (Fernandes, 1993: 162). The erotic attractions across cultural borders chime well with Robert Young's notions of colonial desire, which in turn owe something to Deleuze and Guattari's metaphorical link between the energies of desire and those of capitalism (Young: 170). But Fernandes's novels, in emphasising the creative nature of cultural contact and adaptation, are much closer in spirit to Sommer's constructive romances of Latin America's foundational fictions, where the rigid patriarchies of old are freed up to reflect the demands and aspirations of an emerging bourgeoisie.

PROGRESS AND THE WAR OF THE PACIFIC

As has already been suggested, the war years take up a major space in Fernandes's memory as a writer, just as they do in the collective memory of the inhabitants of Macao who lived through that period. It is therefore no coincidence that the War of the Pacific is a point of reference or the setting for four of the stories in *Nam Van* ('A-Chan a Tancareira', 'Candy', 'Chá com Essência de Cereja', and 'Desforra dum China Rico'), while in two of the stories in *Mong-Há* ('Um Milagre de Natal' and 'Ódio Velho não Dorme'), the absent father returns to reclaim his paternity on the eve of war, and war is depicted as the divide between the world of schooling and the post-war world of university studies in Portugal, which corresponded to Fernandes's own biographical experience. The author therefore recalls those dramatic years with all the intensity with which youth is recollected from the perspective of old age. Yet there is more to it than that. What attracted, and still attracts, English writers to the time frame of the Second World War, is that the conflict served as a period of change from an old world of empire and patriarchy that had seen its apogee during the Victorian era, and a new world, when the old structures of empire were gradually dismantled, and a new, more liberal society emerged, which reached its most expressive and irreverent stage during the 1960s. There is nothing like a major conflict for emphasising the temporary nature of life, for breaking old routines and questioning older, conservative moralities that have somehow become redundant or are considered barriers to progress and greater freedoms. As a neutral power, Portugal was essentially on the periphery of the conflict in Europe,

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but a similar loosening of the strands of patriarchal authority occurred during the country's colonial war of the 1960s, which almost single-handedly toppled the dictatorship of half a century, and it is therefore no coincidence that this conflict became an important theme for a generation of writers who lived through the period and served in Africa. Conventional social relationships give way to ones that are transitory, and the notion that one has to make use of every day while one can. Wherever they occur, war and romance are inevitably intertwined, coupled with the idea that nothing will ever go back to being what it was before. Fernandes is ambiguous. His nostalgia is for tradition and for a Macao that is no more. On the other hand, his heroes are usually unwitting agents of modernity, helping to erode age-old prejudices. Nowhere is this more evident than in his last novel, *A Noite Caiu em Dezembro*, which, although unfinished, contains themes and preoccupations visible in the author's previous work.

The action of the novel begins in December 1941, on the eve of the fall of Hong Kong to the Japanese, and finishes in March 1944, by which time the axis powers are in retreat. Emerging relationships are left open-ended because of the incomplete state of the novel, but there

is a rich and varied array of characters, whose stories unroll against a detailed account of the progress of the war. Thus, Fernandes the memorialist and historian of Macao coexists with the fictionalist and storyteller. At the centre of this action are the Belmares, a time-honoured elite Macanese family, which is already in transition from the patriarchy of a former age enshrined in the figure of the late grandfather, Jerónimo, whose sternness and moral probity are now only a memory. Significantly, the family is shorn of parental figures, for the father and mother, Carlos and Jerusa, are stranded in Portugal by the outbreak of war in Europe. In effect, their offspring have been left to their own devices in Macao: José Pedro, the eldest son, is in charge of the family trading firm; Nuno, the second son, works for the British secret service thanks to a friendship with a British army officer from pre-war days; the two sisters, Ana Teresa and Ana Maria, are young women who have led a sheltered life thanks to the surveillance of Aunt Albertina, the harbinger of conservative values, whose control over her wards is gradually loosened; and Alfredo, the youngest son, is nearing the end of his military service and dreams of studying at Coimbra.

With some members of the legal community of Macao, c. 1965.



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As in his other novels, Fernandes depicts the complex kinship ties that exist among the Macanese, based on the traditions of patriarchal protection, favour and dependence. Among those who have been favoured by the Belmares is Álvaro Sameiro, an orphan, the offspring of a Portuguese and a low-class Chinese woman, briefly a school friend of Nuno, who has been enabled to train as a merchant seaman in Hong Kong, thanks to the largesse of the Belmares family. He is a kind of honorary brother, a family member who is nevertheless tied to the Belmares by a debt of gratitude. The quasi-sibling relationship between Álvaro and Ana Maria Belmares is complicated by their mutual attraction to one another, an attraction that is only inhibited by Álvaro's awareness of her social superiority, and the fact that he has somehow been brought up to think of her as a younger 'sister'. Ana Maria, for her part, is insulted when the 'brother' to whom she feels attracted takes up with a poor girl who, like himself, is from an insecure and abusive family background. Rita Pires, like Álvaro, the offspring of a poor metropolitan father and a Chinese woman, insinuates herself into his intimacy, aided in part by his own good nature and sense of charity towards her, as the effects of war and shortages take their grip on Macao and drive her to near starvation. Rita is as plain as Ana Maria is beautiful, and Álvaro's attraction to the latter is only counter-balanced by his ambivalent mixture of pity and resentment towards the former as she ensnares him. As the relationship develops, Rita demonstrates qualities that had lain hidden: she responds to his gifts by becoming more attractive to him, she shows herself to be a good sailor after she prevails upon him to take her on one of his trips into China to purchase rice supplies, and her superior knowledge of Cantonese enables her to converse with and put his local passengers at ease. Everything suggests that Rita would make a suitable female partner for Álvaro, were it not for his attachment to Ana Maria. Rita's disappearance towards the end of this unfinished novel leaves the way open for the attraction of the quasi-brother and sister to blossom, and for Álvaro to re-enter the family that he has abandoned for most of the war.

The war brings potential for infiltration of the family from other directions as well. The occupation of Hong Kong by the Japanese has brought an influx of Portuguese refugees, among them the Noronha sisters, friends of the young Belmares from the days when they lived in the foreign concession at Shameen before the

war. And with them comes the flirtatious Tilly, a Hong Kong Portuguese girl of 'dubious' behaviour, who befriends Ana Teresa, much to the disapproval of the increasingly hapless Aunt Albertina. These relatively liberated, English-speaking young women are frowned upon by the conservative hierarchy of Macao, while acting as agents of modernisation, and more liberal, if less virtuous, mores. Along with these refugees come singers and musicians of both Portuguese and Filipino origin, to play in the nightclubs of Macao, that become sites of perdition for the young Macanese, musicians such as Art Carneiro and crooners such as Lorna Tavares, whose sensual voice is mentioned suggestively at various points in the novel:

... Sim, era uma voz de feitiço, nostálgica e sensual, com um pendor para a tristeza que acordava um rol de sentimentos e melancolias. O veludo do seu timbre aquecia o coração. Os pares que dançavam apertavam-se instintivamente mais, os namorados colavam as faces um do outro ou trocavam olhares eloquentes de amor. Este o privilégio da voz de Lorna Tavares, a refugiada de guerra e grande cançonetista de cabaret daqueles tempos conturbados.

Lorna Tavares com o seu 'I Understand' foi para Macao sitiada do tempo da Guerra do Pacífico, salvas as devidas proporções e passe-se o exagero, o que foi, em maior escala e na mesma época, Dinah Shore com o seu 'I Walk Alone' nos Estados Unidos da América e Gracie Fields com o seu 'Red Sails in the Sunset' no Reino Unido.³

Fernandes had, of course, already depicted the figure of the free and easy Hong Kong Portuguese female in his earlier story, 'Candy', but it is in this last novel that he introduces for the first time the figure of the White Russian.⁴ Veruska fled war in her native Harbin, and sought refuge in Macao, where she has worked as a circus artist and a dancer, and has also become the mistress of José Pedro. Like Rita with regard to Álvaro, she has insinuated herself into his affections. In the beginning she sees in him a sponsor for her bad habits in gambling and drinking, but he gradually domesticates her, and when she produces twins, he assumes his paternal role. The relationship, however, continues to be frowned upon by the family, and carries on in a semi-clandestine fashion. When Veruska eventually contracts typhoid and lies dying, it is the existence of their children that soon unites the whole family in solidarity, and when the

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With his friend Rodrigo Leal de Carvalho.

two lovers are married, we understand that the children will be brought up as Catholic Macanese. In dramatic terms, Veruska has served her ultra fertile purpose, contributing to the European gene pool of the élite family. At the height of their passion, when José Pedro had called his mistress his 'vaquinha linda' (pretty little cow), to which she had replied by terming him her 'touro insaciável' (insatiable bull), the erotic had joined with the biological, love with procreation, to signal the type of productive relationship that ensured the rejuvenation of the family, the overcoming of the trammels of austere, conventional patriarchy, and the emergence of more modern, liberal, middle-class values.

Two of the other Belmares siblings are also involved in wartime romances that appear to come to an end as the war progresses. Ana Teresa's romance with a western-educated Japanese army officer, Captain Mayakawa, seems to echo a similar situation to that depicted by the Singapore Portuguese Eurasian novelist, Rex Shelley, in his novel *People of the Pear Tree*, set in Japanese-occupied Singapore and Malaya, in which the young Eurasian woman is torn between her attraction for Captain Junichiro and her loyalty to her brother, who is in the resistance.⁵

But it is the romance between Nuno and the Chinese beauty, Sandy, that promises to be a re-working of that between Adozindo and A-Leng, except that they are social equals. Sandy is from the equivalent, conservative, patriarchal background on the Chinese side that Nuno emanates from on the Macanese side. Sandy has had some western education. However, she is destined to marry a man she has never met, but of her own background, and chosen by her father. Nuno, unlike Adozindo, speaks and writes both Cantonese and Mandarin, and has an interest in Chinese culture, sustained by lessons he has taken from an elderly scholar, who has sought refuge in Macao. Indeed, his ambition is to work for the Chinese Customs, like his uncle. We do not know what fate Fernandes would have devised for these two characters if he had brought his novel to term, but as it is, the ending is inconclusive: during Nuno's absence on a mission into the mainland, Sandy disappears into the vastness of China as her father, convinced that the Japanese are going to invade Macao, attempts to penetrate enemy lines to reach free China. Yet, if their relationship has no future, Nuno's positive role is as an active intermediary between Portuguese and Chinese cultural traditions.

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He is Fernandes's example of what a Macanese should be nowadays: both Portuguese and Chinese, but also cosmopolitan—Nuno, for example, speaks fluent English. It is, however, in his knowledge of written Chinese, that he corresponds to Fernandes's own fantasised alter ego, the Macanese the author wished he might have been.⁶

POSTCOLONIALITY

Debate about the literature of Macao in Portuguese has occasionally considered at what point it ceases to be colonial in outlook, and takes on some of the characteristics of literary postcolonialism. This may be an offshoot of the much greater volume of debate concerning African literature in Portuguese over the last 30 years. It is easy enough to consider novels written in the 1920s and 1930s by colonial officials such as Jaime

Celebrating Carnival in the 1950's.



do Inso and Emilio de San Bruno as being well within the colonial mould, given that they glorify in some way the colonial effort while falling prey to orientalist stereotypes. By the time we reach the 1960s, however, it is more difficult. It is not easy to paint the fiction of Maria Ondina Braga with the same brush, not only because she writes as a woman, but she does so as a lone woman in a colonial society in which she is uneasy.⁷⁷

The problem with 'postcolonialism', as John McLeod points out, is that it is a blanket term: the literatures of the former British Empire, the model(s) he exemplifies, were postcolonial in different ways. One of the inhibiting factors when talking about postcolonial literature is that it has traditionally been associated with the political projects that delivered European colonies into independence during the 1960s and 1970s, and this often meshed with other concepts or literary priorities: orature, feminism, postmodernism and, in the lusophone African countries at least, revolutionary Marxist doctrine. McLeod points up the problematic nature of attempts at general theories of postcolonial literature, such as those contained in the otherwise ground-breaking study, *The Empire Writes Back*, by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (McLeod: 28), which do not take sufficient account of different colonial/postcolonial experiences. This is not to mention of course, that the theory relates specifically to literature written in English, and takes little or no account of the colonial/postcolonial experiences articulated in other languages, among them, Portuguese. If there is therefore no overarching factor within a colonial context orchestrated by one linguistic centre, then it is also clear that other European colonial systems possessed their own cultural characteristics and points of reference. Perhaps McLeod's most important assertion for our purposes is that just as postcolonialism does not begin with political independence (that is, it does not come after colonialism, as the term might suggest), nor does colonialism end with it (McLeod: 33).

Postcolonial literary studies in Portugal have understandably focused on lusophone Africa, and the writers who have reached most international acclaim have been those who have in some way appealed to what one might call a postmodern canon in Europe and the West, including a tendency to deconstruct the colonial language inherited, and give it a new shape and expressiveness. If Senna Fernandes drinks from the waters of the realism and romanticism of a previous

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century, it probably reflects not only the generation to which he belonged, but also the conservative nature of society in Macao and the gradual path it took to 'decolonisation'. In that sense, there is a degree of similarity between Brazil, the first and largest colony to gain independence from Portugal, and Macao, the last and smallest territory to witness the end of empire. This gradual process, coupled with the need to foment a more tolerant, liberal society in order to ensure the survival of the territory's capitalist system, suggests that

the foundational fictions of a previous age had a similar relevance to Macao, as it made the transition from Portuguese colony to Chinese Special Administrative Region, under the mantra of 'one country, two systems'. As for Fernandes, his postcoloniality lies, perhaps, in the fact that he foregrounded the customs, history, and internal world of the Macanese and Macao at a time when that world was undergoing profound change. His progressive heroes and heroines reconcile their Portugueseness and their Chineseness. **RC**

NOTES

- 1 The main Macanese writers of the generation that emerged after the War were Deolinda da Conceição (1914-1957), the region's first female journalist and author of the collection of stories, *Cheong Sam – A Cabaia* (1956), Luís Gonzaga Gomes (1907-1976), journalist and chronicler of the popular Chinese customs of Macao, and José dos Santos Ferreira (1919-1993), who wrote verse and stories in Patuá.
- 2 Much as Senna Fernandes's novels would be adapted to the screen, so *O Guarani* was turned into an opera, and later adapted for both the stage and screen, and *A Escrava Isaura* was adapted a century later for television, becoming one of Brazil's first exported soap operas. This adaptation to different forms of mass media suggests not only the strength of romantic tales in the public imagination, but their role in contributing to a sense of community cohesion and 'national' identity.
- 3 The quote is unreferenced, taken as it is from the manuscript in Rich Text format.
- 4 The figure of the White Russian refugee had been depicted in some detail by Fernandes's near contemporary, the Portuguese writer, Rodrigo Leal de Carvalho, who lived in Macao for four decades between 1959 and 1999. His novels *Requiem por Irina Ostrakoff* (1993) and *A Mãe* (2000) give a particular focus to this theme.
- 5 Rex Shelley (1930-2009) was a Singaporean writer, author of four novels depicting the lives of the Portuguese Eurasians in the Malay Peninsula, in both Malacca and Singapore. His first novel, *The Shrimp People*, was published in 1991, and this was followed by *People of the Pear Tree* (1993), *Island in the Centre* (1995), and *River of Roses* (1998). Like Fernandes, his novels tend to be located during and after the Japanese occupation, and seek to preserve a Eurasian cultural memory in danger of being lost with the gradual dispersal of the community.
- 6 There is a revealing comment attributed to Fernandes in a photobiography of the author: 'Uma das minhas maiores amarguras é não saber chinês. A minha paixão era saber como penetrar na cultura chinesa. Tentar compreender. Mas falta-me isso, sinto uma grande frustração' (Lúcia Lemos e Yao Jingming, *Fragments: O Olhar de Henrique de Senna Fernandes*). What he was referring to here was no doubt classical and written Chinese culture, for like most Macanese, he was familiar with spoken Cantonese and popular Cantonese culture as manifested in Macao.
- 7 Emílio de San Bruno and Jaime do Inso were naval officers who served in Macao. Bruno's novel, *O Caso da Rua Volong* was published in 1928, Inso's *O Caminho do Oriente* in 1932. Both won prizes awarded by the Agência Geral das Colónias. Maria Ondina Braga lived in Macao as a teacher in the early 1960s, and again, briefly in Beijing in the early 1980s. Her first collection of stories, *A China Fica ao Lado* (1968) and the novel, *Nocturno em Macau* (1991), are her most emblematic works relating to her experiences in Macao.

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