TRAVELLING THROUGH PORTUGAL AT THE END OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY: WILLIAM BROMLEY'S IMPRESSIONS OF THE PORTUGUESE KINGDOM

Mariana Gonçalves (CETAPS)

The word 'travel' carries multiple meanings. In medieval times it would be often associated with religious pilgrimages or dislocations caused by work or war, which imposed upon the term the notion of effort, suffering. The word itself shares an etymological root with the French term *travail*, 'work', or, in Portuguese, the word *travessia*, which can be interpreted as a wide, expanded and challenging travel, normally constituting an external as well as an internal process of discovering, as all the big adventures are.

Paul Fussell insists that "travel is work. Etymologically a traveler is one who suffers travail, a word deriving in its turn from Latin *tripalium*, a torture instrument consisting on three stakes designed to rack the body (39)". Thus, travelling wasn't an agreeable and carefree activity, instead forcing people to move under difficult and dangerous conditions, without even knowing if they would ever return to the starting point. Going away could mean saying a definite goodbye to birthplaces and loved ones. Thinking nowadays of that kind of departure and the consciousness of radical separation it implied is an intriguing exercise. Today the moments of absence are usually brief or have a defined deadline. To leave something or someone to be away in a travel doesn't necessarily pose life-changing questions, and moving from a country to another is often motivated by the will of leisure, pleasure and rest from everyday life. Nowadays to travel is normally to get a rewarding and comforting time away from work and the obligations of a scheduled life. The very opposite of the hardships it suggested in the past.

Fernando Cristóvão claims that, around the fifteenth century, the medieval traveller approached the new, strange and exotic that he found along the way with awe and astonishment. His relation with the external reality was based upon a "wandering voyeurism". In the sixteenth century, the revolution in the way man regards himself and his place in the world led the way for a change in paradigm: the universe is now centered on human potential, and the idea of God plays no longer the defining part in the course of men's lives. Man is told that there is nothing greater than his mind and his ability to evolve and make the world evolve. Thus, the importance of empirical experiences through which one can draw conclusions about the matters of life may have empowered a new kind of traveller in Britain.

James Buzard declares that "following the great Renaissance age of colonial exploration and expansion, an articulated, systematic empiricism made travelling about the world and seeing the new and different 'something like an obligation for the person conscientious about developing the mind and accumulating the knowledge'" (37). The theory that man is a blank slate upon which, during his life, knowledge is imprinted by several practical experiments turned travel into the best way of fulfilling those expectations. The double sense of the word 'impressions' indicates precisely the two-faced process of travelling: the impression one may get can be physical, like visible letters imprinted on paper or marks imprinted on skin, but the word refers also to mental images, pictures and feelings experienced during the journey. By reading travel narratives, one may sense how the traveller remembers the events he chooses to describe and why he retains with detail certain episodes, briefly addressing others. His vision and judgment of the Other, the foreign, is often the translation of a clash of cultures and behaviors.

Travelling may also be envisioned as a path for personal growth, into adulthood. That and the notion that knowledge comes from vivid experiences enabled in the eighteenth century a new kind of travel in England: the Grand Tour. After finishing their college degree, young men from upper classes were encouraged to take on a journey through Europe, the central capitals being Paris and Rome. Their ultimate purpose was to become complete gentlemen. During this travel, they would, according to James Buzard, "cultivate historical consciousness and artistic tastes", as well as "a certain transeuropean class consciousness, a horizontal identification that linked the superior classes of Britain with their counterparts on the Continent and imposed upon the traveller a sense that he shared with these counterparts, a common responsibility for the welfare of

Europe as a whole" (41). Rome was a mandatory destination, because there these travellers could apprehend the models of classical culture and "drew parallels between their nation's current position and that of ancient Roman empire" (39).

Sir William Bromley is counted among these travellers. Born in 1663 or 1664, the date is unclear, he was the son of another Sir William Bromley, a knight, and descended from an old Staffordshire family. He entered at Christ Church, a college in the University of Oxford, in 1679, and received a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1681. As a Tory partisan, we would pursue a political career, representing the High Tory Constituency of the University of Oxford in Parliament and becoming Speaker of the House of Commons of Great Britain in 1710. In 1713 he assumed the position of Secretary of State for the Northern Department. He lost office in 1714, when a Whig ministry took over, under the reign of King George I, but maintained his position in the House of Commons until the 1720s, when his health began to decline. He married four times and died in 1732.

After finishing his college education and before the rise of his political career, Sir William Bromley spent several years travelling through Europe. In 1692, he published his account of his own Grand Tour, entitled *Remarks in the Grand Tour of France and Italy. Perform'd by a Person of Quality, in the Year, 1691*, followed in 1702 by *Several Years Travels Through Portugal, Spain, Italy, Germany, Prussia, Sweden, Denmark and the United Provinces, Performed by a Gentleman*. The preface to this work states that these travels were undertaken for "his own private satisfaction", and further ahead Bromley declares that was "the love of foreign travel" to propel him into this journey. The preface give us also the information that travel narratives were, by this time, well received amongst the British, for "they are entertaining and informing to the curious and inquisitive that have not the Opportunity of travelling themselves, and to others they do often with great pleasure revive, and refresh the Memory of what they have seen".

The author begins his account informing the reader of the date of his departure from England, 1693. He was 30 years old. He would arrive at Lisbon a little before Lent, we might assume that somewhere in February 1694, and would leave the capital three months later, on the 6th May. Bromley reveals why he had chosen to begin his travel in Portugal. It had to do with the political situation of England, by this time at war with France and Holland, which turned the Iberian Peninsula into the best and safest way to reach Italy. Bromley travelled on board a merchant ship and made a safe arrival at Lisbon after a few accidents at

sea, on which he does not give any description. His account of the Portuguese capital is quite generic, as he reveals in the very beginning of the narrative that even if he stayed in Lisbon for some months, he did not see a great part of the city. For that he also blames the people of Lisbon, that he believes to be "very little acquainted with the Curiosity of a Traveller" (2) and incapable of guiding the foreigner through the city and its points of interest.

The first impressions of the city and its people were very negative, for the narrow and steep streets and their offensive smells proved to be most unpleasant. Bromley noticed the filth of the streets, which, as he declares, could discourage any curious and inquisitive mind. In *Account of the Kingdom of Portugal*, a manuscript description of Lisbon around 1701 by the English gentlemen Thomas Cox and Cox Macro, the authors also highlight the dirtiness of the streets, where all kind of excrements were thrown, promoting a plague of mosquitoes in the Summer. About the people, they reveal that they smelled heavily of condiments used in preparing food, like garlic and coriander, and that the Portuguese had the tendency of speaking very close to the head of the person they were talking to, not maintaining a comfortable distance.

The next topic that caught the attention of William Bromley for its excessive display was the "monstrous" religious processions. As he arrived a little before Lent, he could experience a particularly manifest period of religious exhibitions, and especially of "scandalous penances" (2). This display of Catholic faith proved to be rather infamous to this Protestant traveller. Bromley specifies that the most shocking about these processions was the fact that the greatest part of the Penitents that whipped and tortured themselves through the streets were paid to do so. He met one of these Hirelings, as he calls them, and declares him to be "one of the most prophane and lew'd villains I ever met with; a Porter, employed by the English, told me he was hired to Whip himself yearly among other publickly; for which he was paid by a Religious Society". About the extreme fanaticism of these penances, he adds: "Other that are persuaded to it by the Preists [sic] as a Religious Act to atone and expiate their Sins, perform it with great severity by a blind zeal or rather Folly, even to the hazard both of Soul and Body, for, to keep them within some bounds of moderation, the Priest positively declares who ever Dies under those Extravagances is actually Damned, yet it is, and hath been too well known, that there have been some so infatuated as in this manner to Murder themselves" (3).

This extremeness in the display of Catholic religion can be somewhat explained by the power of the Inquisition at this time in the Portuguese society. In the reign of King D. João IV, from 1640 to 1656, this Catholic institution had seen their reach and authority reduced. By the action of Father António Vieira, who had served the royal family in the reign of D. João IV as tutor of the then prince D. Pedro, Pope Innocent XI decided to suspend the Inquisition in Portugal for seven years, from 1674 to 1681. The now King D. Pedro II, son of D. João IV and brother to the previous king, D. Afonso VI, who had been forced to renounce the throne in 1668, was incapable of containing the power of this Catholic Institution and the heavy restrictions upon the New Christians, the great part of which were feared to be concealed Jews, as William Bromley puts it.

Bromley, who was accused of expressing a favourable position towards Catholicism in his work *Remarks in the Grand Tour of France and Italy*, was confronted in Lisbon with one of the darkest features of this religion and reveals that even the English Roman Catholics that he met in the Portuguese capital confessed to him that had they been introduced to this religion in Portugal and not in France, they would never have become Catholics.

Of the buildings in Lisbon, the author does not say much, mentioning briefly the King's palace, at that time located in Alcântara, but later destroyed by the Lisbon Earthquake of 1755. Of the furniture and decorations of Churches, Convents, Palaces and Houses, the traveller reports that they are very poor. Due to the narrowness of the streets, the coaches weren't practical, being replaced by litters carried between mules.

Focusing on the traits of the people he observes, he notices, as Thomas Cox did as well, the great number of people, young and old, wearing glasses. He considers that the result of the frequent medical procedure of bleedings. That, along with a diet of hen broth, seemed to be the cure for all evil. Even today in Portuguese society chicken soup is commonly regarded as comforting food to give to the sick. Just as a note, Cox adds that the Portuguese men used glasses constantly because of the seriousness it conferred to their visage.

On the subject of Portuguese women, both authors agree on the excess of make-up, and Bromley declares that they "paint most abominably, and begin so young that they are forced to use it as they grow more in years, otherwise they would soon look much decay'd" (4). In his *Account*, Cox refers the use of mercury based make-up even on one month old babies. For women of the upper classes, the way of dressing was very extravagant.

Bromley describes the use of exceptionally large *Guardifantas*, a kind of dress with a very prominent skirt that made it very difficult to pass through some doors. The modesty of Portuguese women when it comes to their feet was immense, since Bromley refers that they are determined never to show them and make special arrangements in order to assure that. They wore long petticoats and, in and out of coaches, cloaks were strategically placed in order to hide their feet. On the other hand, the plunging openness of cleavages and the exhibition of bare shoulders stunned the traveller for the boldness it shown, unseen in any other Country.

On the temper of Portuguese men, William Bromley discloses that they are "exceeding jealous and confine their Women very close, if any of them are Suspected of Incontinency, they are very fortunate to Scape with their lives" (5). In his description of Lisbon, Cox also comments on the revengeful character of Portuguese men, and the impunity of those who, having found their wives guilty of adultery, murdered them. Unlike the women, men dress in a very sober way, wearing mostly black, for the use of gold or silver laces could be perceived as an indication of an effeminate behaviour and could offend the vigilant stare of the Inquisition.

The trade relations between Portugal and England were at this time very privileged. The alliance between the two kingdoms through the marriage of the Portuguese princess D. Catarina de Bragança, sister of the now king D. Pedro II, to the English monarch Charles II, in 1661, would establish favourable conditions for the trading of products between the two countries. Furthermore, English had earned with this alliance free trade in the Portuguese colonies, like Brazil. The signing of the Methuen Treaty in 1703 would support and promote even more the Anglo-Portuguese commercial alliance. Bromley notices that the main Portuguese products exported to England were salt, which was then directed to the new English colonies, fruit, oil and wine. England, on the other hand, contributed with dry codfish, very much appreciated in Portugal then and still greatly consumed today. Even though Portugal was a privileged country as far as the production of wine is concerned, its people were perceived by both Bromley and Cox as not being heavy drinkers, even despising the excesses of drunkenness. As Thomas Cox discloses, the biggest insult that Portuguese could think of when arguing with an Englishman was to call him "an English sponge".

William Bromley, as mentioned above, stayed in Lisbon for three months, at a friend's summer country house, located at a part of the city called *Luz* (Light),which still exists today under

that designation. These summer houses, called *Chentos* by this traveller, and particularly the one on which he stayed in, are said to be very pleasant, due to their gardens, vineyards and accommodations.

From Lisbon, Bromley headed ultimately to Vila Nova de Cerveira, a frontier town in the North of Portugal, from where he crossed to Galicia, Spain. On the way to the Portuguese frontier, the author points out several places, like Sacavém, Alverca, Alhandra, Vila Franca de Xira or Castanheira do Ribatejo, where he lodged for one night and was very displeased with the accommodations. From there, he continued to traverse the country, passing by Vila Nova da Rainha, Azambuja or Santarém. Travelling through a country of plains, abundant in landscapes of vineyards, olive trees and corn fields, is painted by Bromley as very enjoyable.

He arrived at Coimbra four days after leaving Lisbon. On crossing the river Mondego to enter the town, he notices immediately the big extension of the bridge he is on and also the effects of the floods provoked by the progressive height of the waters, as he declares that the present bridge is built upon another bridge "devoured by time and the increase of the sands" (9). That same problem was endured by one of the referred nunneries, the Monastery of Santa Clara, built in the thirteenth century and that ended up being partially swallowed by the river Mondego over the years. By 1677, the monastery had become uninhabitable, forcing the construction of a new convent in another part of the city. The abandoned monastery was then called Santa-Clara-a-Velha (Santa Clara-the-Old) and the new one, Santa-Clara-a-Nova (Santa-Clara-the-New). What remains of the old monastery was the subject of an archeological intervention and a work of restoration some years ago, being now open to public visiting.

Bromley visits the University of Coimbra, the first Portuguese university, founded in 1290, that he describes as consisting of two colleges, that of Saint Peters [sic] and that of Saint Pauls [sic], serving formerly as Palaces for the royal family. Bromley states that

> (…) their Schools are very mean in respect of those at Oxford, tho' they have their publick Lectures read in them, in all Sciences; I was told they have a handsome Library, tho' I could not get a sight of it. That day I was there being a Day of publick Exercise for a young student a *Fydalgo*'s Son then performing for his Dr. in Laws Degree, he read his lectures in the Hall. (…) they say there are 5000 students belonging to this university, much too many for

> their College to receive, so that none but the Sons of the Nobility, and those of the better rank have their Chambers in them, the rest lodg [sic] themselves as conveniently as they can in the town" (10-11).

Among the reliques seen by William Bromley at the Church of Santa Cruz, in Coimbra, is a sword that some believe to have belonged to the first King of Portugal, D. Afonso Henriques. His tomb is located in the mentioned church. There, Bromley is told the story involving the mysterious appearance of the sword in the High Altar of the Church, after King D. Sebastião borrowed it to go to war. Today that sword can be found at Porto Military Museum, but its origin is uncertain.

After staying for two days in Coimbra, Bromley leaves for Aveiro. He finds its streets the sweetest and cleanest of Portugal. He notices the great production of salt on Aveiro's river and addresses the defensive wall of the city, holding a population of 15 to 16000 souls.

During the rest of the journey through Portugal, Bromley focuses mainly on the number of Convents and Religious buildings present in the several towns he visits along the way, as well as on their defensive walls and garrisons. He finds the streets of Porto much better paved and clean than those of Lisbon. Travelling on the back of a horse, he finds the road from Porto to Guimarães so steep and rough that he considers it the worst he have ever seen. Of Viana do Castelo he says that "to my Fancy is much the pleasantest Town of any I saw in Portugal, by reason it lyes so open to the Sea that from the Key one may see any Ship upon that Coast (21-22)". From there he went to Caminha, and then proceeded to Vila Nova de Cerveira, where he crosses the frontier, entering in Valencia, Spain.

The account of his travel through Portugal add up to 23 pages, but the rhythm of the description is quick, and in the last pages, when Bromley addresses the cities he found on its way to Spain the content of the narrative is quite numeric and brief. Nevertheless, the account on the traits and manners of the Portuguese when approached by an English sensibility is an example of how the unpredictability of a foreign Other and the way we adapt ourselves to the diversity of the world are among the great challenges and the valuable lessons of travel.

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