

Alexandre O'Neill (1924-1986), poet

By Edmundo Murray



Alexandre O'Neill (1924-1986)
(Vasco Gargalo)

O'Neill, Alexandre [born Alexandre Manuel Vahia de Castro O'Neill de Bulhões] (1924-1986), poet, was born on 19 December 1924 in Lisbon, the only child of the aristocratic banker José António Pereira de Eça O'Neill de Bulhões (b. 1890) and his wife, Maria da Glória Vahia de Barros de Castro (1905-1989). The family belonged to a patrician class, and its members have been in the Portuguese government, army and church since the Middle Ages. Alexandre O'Neill's paternal grandmother, Maria da Conceição Infante de Lacerda Pereira de Eça Custance O'Neill (b. 1873) descended from Sean [João] O'Neill (b. ca. 1720), born in Kilmore, county Tyrone, who in 1740 settled in Almada, near Lisbon, being accepted by the Portuguese court as an exiled Catholic nobleman.

After completing secondary school, Alexandre O'Neill studied to be a seaman at the Nautical School of Lisbon but failed due to his marked myopia. Due to family conflicts, in 1946 he went to live with an uncle and started writing poetry. In 1948 O'Neill was among the founders of the Surrealist Movement in Lisbon, and contributed poems to *Ampola Miraculosa*, a book of surrealist collages. His relations with the surrealist group ended in 1950 due to disagreements about aesthetics and style. The following year, O'Neill's collection *Tempo de fantasmas*, was published in Lisbon. Suspected of rebel activities, in 1953 he was arrested by the state security police and remained in prison for forty days.

O'Neill earned his living as a writer of advertising copy. He worked for many agencies, usually as a freelance creative director. Some of his promotional slogans became famous for their double meanings, and were repeated by millions of Portuguese people. Among them were: *Há mar e mar, há ir e voltar* (Instituto de Socorros a Náufragos), *Bosch é Bom* (Bosch), *No Colchão Lusoespuma, Você Dá Duas Que Parecem Uma* (Colchões Lusoespuma), and *Vá de Metro Satanás* (Metropolitano de Lisboa).

Alexandre O'Neill's poetic works include *Tempo de Fantasmas* (1951), *No Reino da Dinamarca* (1958), *Abandono Vigiado* (1960), *Poemas com Endereço* (1962), *Feira Cabisbaixa* (1965), *De Ombro na Ombreira* (1969), *Entre a Cortina e a Vidraça* (1972), *A Saca de Orelhas* (1979), *As Horas Já de Números Vestidas* (1981), *Dezanove Poemas* (1983), and *O Princípio da Utopia* (1986). He also published two books in prose, *As Andorinhas não Têm Restaurante* (1970), and *Uma Coisa em Forma de Assim* (1980), as well as selections of poems by Gomes Leal, Teixeira de Pascoães (with F. Cunha Leão), Carl Sandburg and João Cabral de Melo Neto. In addition, O'Neill recorded *Alexandre O'Neill: diz poemas de sua autoria*.

After engaging in an intermittent relationship with the Bulgarian surrealist poet Nora Mitrani in 1949, Alexandre O'Neill married Noémia Delgado in 1957 and Teresa Patrício Gouveia in 1971.

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References

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