

**Monarchism versus Republicanism: Conflicting Discourses in
Charles Thomas-Stanford's *The Ace of Hearts* (1912)**

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Abstract

When, in 1912, an English Member of Parliament, thirty-eight year old John Braintree, visits the island of Madeira, he becomes, by chance, unwillingly entangled in a monarchic conspiracy to overthrow the young Republican Government. In order to prevent him from betraying their secret to the Governor, Braintree is made prisoner in a village in the north-east coast of the island. He manages to escape but is confronted with a series of more or less dangerous incidents involving the opposing parties in conflict which shed light on the different political attitudes and high held hopes of each.

This is, in short, what one may find in *The Ace of Hearts*, a novel by Charles Thomas-Stanford, first published in 1912, and one of the many books published during all of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century by travellers who visited the island. In this specific case, one has unexpected contact with different clashing ideological opinions which fix the political instability of this historical moment.

This paper aims to identify these discourses of conflict while revealing, at the same time, the cultural gap between the Portuguese and the English and the effect this has on domestic policies and the (mis)management of the colonies.

John Braintree, a thirty-eight year old Member of Parliament who represented the Downton division of East Wessex, was 'sick to death' of the proceedings in Parliament, of the unreasonable majority and their arbitrariness with a consequently fruitless opposition, of the Insurance Bill and its tiresome details. He felt he urgently needed a rest and, for such a circumstance, nothing better than the Portuguese island of Madeira. He had mastered the Portuguese tongue because he had spent part of his childhood in Lisbon (his father was British Minister there) and had happened to call on the island several times on his way to South Africa. On these occasions he 'had noted its quiet and rather old-world charm, its flower-laden gardens, its genial warmth even in midwinter, and its aloofness from the march of modern improvement'¹. As a politician, he felt it would be interesting to see *in loco* how the year-old Republican Government was getting along. Moreover, there he intended to get on with his

monograph, somewhat in the nature of a '*catalogue raisonné*', getting his loose notes on the Chinese porcelain of the Ming dynasty into order.

And so, despite the opposition of his sister-in-law, Clara Blackdown, who was forever trying to 'sequester' him somewhere (on this occasion to Algiers via Monte Carlo) and, in doing so, to find him a perfect match, on Wednesday, 3rd January 1912, Braintree was already at the Palace Hotel in Funchal. Here, at the Casino, listening to the classical music played by a Spanish sextette, he met Donna Consuelo Garcia with whom he fell into that easy intimacy which so often comes when one meets people on the course of one's travels.

Clara had written him a letter from Monte Carlo accounting for the trip to North Africa (she had meanwhile gone with her husband, Joe Blackwell, and Braintree's substitute, Tommy Creswell). Helen Shenstone, a more conventional than actual cousin, had also informed him that she, her father, Sir Henry Shenstone, and her sister Mabel would be arriving from Lisbon on their yacht, the *Dalliance*, on Friday the 5th, from whence they would sail on the 9th for a week's cruise to the north coast of Madeira as well as to Porto Santo where her father wished to collect shells.

The day following the Shenstones' short and pleasant stay and their departure to Porto Santo, and after seeing off Mr. Ralston, an influential farmer in the Downton division, on the Cape bound *Armadale Castle* which had called at Funchal that morning, Braintree decided to go for a longer walk higher up in the mountains. For such an end, nothing better than catching the rail to Monte and walking from there onwards along the mountain track. The air was fresh and the view which unfolded itself was breathtaking. Before he realised it, Braintree had walked farther than he should have and clouds were rapidly gathering. They eventually closed in and he lost his way in the fog. Night fell and with it came rain, sleet and snow. Numb with cold, he made his way along a track he had managed to find, and after some time came to a house with light within. He was well received, given food, and then let into a meeting in which about a dozen upper class men were participating. The Conde de São Martinho was presiding, and two others caught his attention – João Machico and Don Alfonso Diaz. After some time had passed, he learned that he was taking part in a conspiracy plot against

the Republican Government. The overthrow was to take place on the 1st February with Lisbon and Oporto leading the process. It was only afterwards that Mr. John Paynter arrived. To the Portuguese ear Braintree and Paynter had sounded similar and identities had been mistaken. Paynter was the dark man that had come from the Azores on the *San Miguel* on the 5th and whom Braintree had met at his hotel.

Realising that Braintree had been let into their secret, the reactions that followed were diverse. Don Alfonso Diaz at once tried to shoot him dead but was stopped in time by the others. The Conde, a gentleman in fact, would take Braintree's word that he would say nothing, but João Machico thought it best to take no risks. He would be taken to a house Machico owned in Santana and kept there until the confounded day on which the insurrection was to take place. He had fallen into the hands of monarchists, the thing he least desired, especially after having received a call from Mr. Luiz Carvalho at his hotel. Carvalho worked for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Lisbon and was assisting the Governor. His concern regarding the friendship of Clara and Braintree's brother for the ex-king Manoel and the fact that he almost threatened Braintree to keep out of politics had made the latter suspect that Clara's letter had been violated by inquisitors.

On the 14th, after four days' imprisonment, through the barred window of his room in the house of the Morgado of Santana, Braintree caught sight of Helen Shenstone sketching the ruined chapel of the property. Not wanting to call out loud to her for fear that Machico's factor, António da Silva, might hear, he jotted a message on the back of the ace of hearts he took from the pack of cards which had been given to him, and threw it over to Helen. She had stayed behind instead of going to Porto Santo and immediately arranged an escape plan. The following morning he escaped to a cove at the foot of the steep cliffs behind Santana, where Helen had arranged for a boat to be at hand. On their descent, they realised they were being followed by Alfonso Diaz who, when reaching the pebbly beach, again took a shot at them. Fortunately, and thanks to Braintree's earnest rowing, they were already out of reach.

Seeing that Alfonso Diaz was riding along the cliff top towards Ponta Delgada, they decided to row back to Faial. After landing, they thought it best to take the shortest

and most direct route to Funchal. Some time afterwards, having left the Metade valley, they entered that of Ribeiro Frio and decided to have something to eat after entering the *levada* to admire the view of virgin ground that opened itself before and below them. However, a landslip occurred and they were trapped. They walked along the *levada* until they came upon a little hut used as a resting place by the engineer in charge of the men who repaired the *levada*. They had to spend the night there, Helen within and Braintree without. The following morning, a goatherd making his way up the steep slopes of the valley passed near them and helped them to the top of Areiro. From there they would follow to Monte and down to Funchal. However, reaching the Observatory Braintree saw Donna Consuelo Garcia, Alfonso Diaz and Mr Luiz de Carvalho. After they had gone inside, Braintree crept below one of the open windows and overheard the conversation — Consuelo and the Spaniard were betraying the monarchists in exchange for money. Included in the list that was handed over to the agent of the Government was Braintree's name. He quickly made his way back to where he had left Helen and they made their way to Funchal not via Monte, but rather descending Santo António and São Roque.

They boarded the *Dalliance* that same day, the 16th, and, after having narrated all the events to Sir Henry, they decided that the best would be to warn the Count of the recent developments so that he would not be caught off guard. Braintree decided to speak to Dr. Wilson, who lived in Rua da Carreira, to see if he could hear any late gossip in relation to politics.. But Dr. Wilson had gone to a ball at the Quinta Pavão and Braintree decided to go there hoping to speak to the man. Once there, at the Casino, he saw Diaz losing all of his blood-money, but did not manage to talk to Dr. Wilson. The following morning, he sought the Count but he was not to be found at home. Braintree learned that he was away but had no further information. He tried Mr. Smithson, a merchant, and learned that the Count was probably in his house in Boa Ventura.

Early in the morning, on Thursday 18th, Braintree left for the north of the island in the company of Shorter, Sir Henry's first mate. They made their way to the Cural via Santo António, and from there onwards to Boa Ventura through the Torrinhas Pass. Upon reaching the Count's house they found João Machico there. He and the Count

were busy making compromising documents disappear. They had to make haste for some soldiers had caught up with Braintree at the Torrinhas and he had learned that they would arrest the Count early in the morning. Machico knew that the governor was already taking action and had made some arrests at S. Vicente. He thus feared for the safety of a fellow conspirator, Francisco Vasconcellos, who lived in Ponta Delgada. He, Braintree and Shorter went to his rescue in the middle of the night and were back before daybreak. The plan was to ride on horseback to Santana where the *Dalliance* would be waiting near the same cove from which Braintree and Helen had rowed for their lives.

On the way there they came across Diaz who again tried to shoot them, but Machico was faster and Diaz met his end over the cliff. At the appointed time the yacht was not off Santana. Policemen began to appear and Braintree began to fear that they would all be caught after all but, in the last moment, the yacht rounded the promontory. Machico rode to Funchal and Braintree, the Count and Shorter made their way in earnest down the cliff. Once on board the English yacht the authorities had no power over them.

Aboard the *Dalliance* was Mr Paynter. He had told Sir Henry that he knew Braintree and asked him for a passage. Here Braintree learned that Paynter was a spy and so was Consuello, although she worked for both sides. In any case all the troubles had been left behind and now they were safe making their way to the Mediterranean.

All of this could be fact if it were not fiction. Even so, in *The Ace of Hearts — A Romance of Today*, a novel by Charles Thomas-Stanford (1858-1932) first published in 1912, one finds elements that have factual evidence. The novel itself has an opening epigraph from Lord Byron's 'Letters' which states that 'There should always be some foundation of fact for the most airy fabric, and pure invention is but the talent of a liar'.

As far as the political events in the plot are concerned, reading the newspapers of the time, one realises that the atmosphere was one of political unrest and distrust. Of course there were those who, being still monarchists, were evidently against the

Republican government. Amongst the republicans themselves also existed those who did not agree with the present state of affairs and with the way things were being conducted.

The reaction to the Republic, on behalf of the common citizen, was one of apparent indifference so far as we can gather from certain articles in the press urging citizens to participate actively in the destiny of their country, of which this one printed on 1st January 1912 in *Diário de Notícias* (Funchal), under the heading ‘The Legacies of the Old Year’, may be an example:

The traditional practice, here in the Atlantic Pearl, is that each one goes about his own business, and the population in general does not take any interest in public affairs making it seem that general prosperity has nothing to do with the prosperity of each and every one.

Today, with the Republican-democrat regime, it is vital that all citizens who are entitled to active participation take part in and contribute to the national progress and riches without discarding common interests.

To expect everything from the government’s spontaneous initiative is to condemn all private action, an economic flaw all economists insist on denouncing.

But, besides this, it also represents the disempowerment of the people. It excludes them from the principle of popular sovereignty which assists all citizens, whether individually or collectively considered.²

On the other hand, amongst those who participated actively in politics, the confrontation was constant and openly expressed in the local papers, which, in turn, were at the service of the different factions.

The newspaper *O Povo*, in its edition of Saturday 6th January, prints a vehement Republican article entitled ‘Traitors!...’³ against the *Diário da Madeira*, accusing it of its monarchical ideologies and of aspiring to a foreign administration for Portugal. This daily was the property of a foreigner, all the more reason to look at it with suspicion.

The *Diário da Madeira*, in turn, refuted accusations and published articles presenting hypothetical scenarios, such as the one edited on the 5th entitled ‘Black Fantasies —

What would happen in Lisbon if a monarchic conspiracy overthrew the Government'⁴. The *Diário de Notícias*, on the other hand, informs the readers of the Republicans' activities as we can see in the edition of January 19th where one learns that 'yesterday, the Committee for the Republican Union was appointed in this district under the leadership of Dr. José Joaquim de Freitas'⁵.

Although there is no evidence that the incidents presented in the plot of *The Ace of Hearts* really took place, in the edition of January 8th of the *Diário de Notícias*, under the section 'Portugal abroad' one comes across the following news from Paris (3rd January) reading 'Some newspapers in London and Paris join the *Correio Hespanhol*, of Madrid in publishing news related to a new monarchic *complot* against the Portuguese Republic, organised in London by members of the high finance'⁶. The Londoners, supposedly involved in the conspiracy, probably included someone in the nature of Mr John Paynter who belonged to the Royalist Committee in London. Moreover, the second class British cruiser *Melpomene* did in fact call at Funchal at the end of the month and was at the island during the period appointed for the overthrow⁷.

News of incidents on a national level were also printed, likewise enhancing the mentioned climate of instability. For example, in the *Diário de Notícias* of January 3rd, we find out that 'a Priest was fined for criticising the laws of the Republic'⁸, and again on the 5th that five conspirators had managed to escape from the Prison of Aljube in Oporto⁹.

As far as Braintree is concerned, one does not know to what extent he embodies the author himself. The sojourn of the character begins roughly at the same time as that of the author. Although his name is not to be found amongst the passengers included in the lists of arrivals, we know that the *Balmoral Castle* called at Funchal coming from Southampton on the 3rd and brought six passengers for the island. The *Diário de Notícias* of January 1st, in its 'List of Foreigners' section, informs the reader that Mr and Mrs Charles Thomas-Stanford were visitors to the island and were staying at the Quinta Stanford¹⁰. This information is repeated every week until they leave with their maid on the 15th March, on board the *SS Cedric*, for the Mediterranean (Gibraltar, Algiers, Monaco, Genoa, Naples and Alexandria). The *Diário da Madeira* of the 9th

also states, in its 'Fashionable Diário' section, that 'it is some days since Mr. C. Thomas Stanford, owner of the Quinta Stanford, has arrived in Madeira proceeding from England'¹¹.

Apparently Thomas-Stanford visited the island regularly and what we find in *The Ace of Hearts* concerning the island is well known matter to the author. Much of the scenery, places, environments described in the novel are present in his *Leaves From a Madeira Garden*, first published in 1909. In the 'Preface' he states that

Perhaps no apology is needed for this trivial story of an uneventful winter in an inconsiderable island. Madeira has indeed been long a household word in Great Britain. Its generous wine has played an important part in producing the hereditary goutiness of the nation; and its genial climate is remembered in many families as having mitigated the sufferings of an invalid relation. Its is perhaps less generally known that its mountain scenery is not surpassed in beauty, that much of the finest vegetation of the world flourishes and flowers there during the winter months, and that the gardens in and around Funchal are, for brilliance and charm, scarcely to be matched elsewhere.¹²

He did not intend to produce a handbook on Madeira, nor was it a scientific book dealing with the climate, the meteorology, the flora, or any other natural features. It was rather a collection of inconsequent jottings on many subjects. However, he knew what he was talking about for 'it has been my good fortune to pass many winters in the island, I cannot plead ignorance as an excuse for my shortcomings and mistakes'¹³. In speaking so, he distanced himself from, and at the same time criticised, those that visited the island once and had 'an irritating trick of writing about well-known places with an air of having discovered them'¹⁴. As for his comments on politics, he mentions those he considers the failings and mistakes of the Portuguese Government, especially in its fiscal system, hoping, however, that in doing so and expressing his opinions freely he had not 'trodden upon any one's corns'.

In *The Ace of Hearts*, Braintree stated, on the occasion that he received a visit from Luiz Carvalho, that he did not know king Manoel, Monarchy, Republic, Anarchy or whatever Senhor Carvalho preferred. The latter was welcome to any as far as he was

concerned. It is rather the other characters in the novel who state their opinion, taking sides.

Machico had, in the recent past, held high hopes for João Franco, the last Prime Minister of King Carlos. He endeavoured, Machico had believed, to put Portuguese politics and finances on an honest basis. However, in doing so, he had inevitably trodden on numberless interests. It is believed that he had brought about the death of the king, but according to Machico the death of a man, even a king, was nothing compared with the cause Franco was working. After the assassination of the king, Franco lost his nerve and fled, and Monarchy collapsed like a pack of cards. Apparently Machico now believed that restored Monarchy was the best for what he wanted, but if this failed (and betrayal was the most probable reason for failure, as he so many times points out) then he would try to manage, on terms, with the Republican Government for he could pull strings in the island. What he ultimately sought, was prosperity for the island and his country, which, according to his words, were lacking.

My own people (...) look to the State for everything, and the State calmly assumes its right for universal interference. You cannot buy and sell freely, you cannot lease your property for a long term of years, because you would be infringing the rights of some concessionaire, or interfering with some outrageous tax. Our fiscal system is called Protection, but it is Protection gone mad; it appears designed rather to protect the country from the introduction or maintenance of industries than to foster industries which might otherwise be swamped by foreign competition. The result is naturally a widespread corruption — not necessarily in the crude form of money payment, but in what I may term a recognized system of ‘back-scratching’. If a man helps you to get a concession, he expects you to help him, or his second cousin, to get something else. Ah! if you English only knew how fortunate and wise you have been in the past, you would revolt against your rapidly growing State-interference, and the enormous increase of office holders which your recent legislation involves.¹⁵

Machico also thought that the so much mooted news of the sale of the Portuguese colonies in Africa to Germany or England were ridiculous because, besides his sentimental reasons, the proceeds would be squandered in a few years and Portugal would be put into a worse situation than that of which it was in before. The

Portuguese, it appeared, 'possessed one of the finest estates in the world, and they mismanaged it so that it did not pay to work'¹⁶.

On the other hand, Captain Perestrello, an officer of the garrison of Funchal, thought that until recently even Madeira had been mismanaged for 'Madeira has unfortunately been regarded by Lisbon as a milch-cow. If we had enjoyed anything like your English Colonial system, we should have been exceedingly prosperous'¹⁷.

Donna Consuelo Garcia, despite being a Republican and adoring Republican ideals in theory, shared pretty much the same opinion, for, in practice, it was a failure and because of it Lisbon was now 'a city of the dead.(...) the rich Americans will not come any more. They do not want to shake the hands with a President; they can do that at home. They want to bow to the heir of a hundred kings. They simply adore your ridiculous remnants of feudalism.'¹⁸

The persecution of the Church was also seen as a grave tactical error committed by the Republic. The Count of São Martinho, hopelessly out of touch with the practical side of politics in his country despite his good intentions, thought that his king would not be restored to the throne of his ancestors because 'our people have sinned. They have expelled the Lord's anointed; they have laid sacrilegious hands on the Ark of the Covenant; our bishops have been driven from their sees, our priests reduced to beggary, our holy men and women despoiled and despitefully treated'¹⁹.

The behaviour of the English abroad is also curiously depicted in the novel. While attending the Casino, in a period in which game playing was being regulated in Madeira, Donna Consuelo calls Braintree's attention to the fact that most of the players were English.

You are very amusing, you English. You have a horror of the play; you regard it as the invention of the devil; you do not permit it in your *établissements* at home; and yet inside there (...) are half a dozen Portuguese and two Germans, and all the rest are English — most of them your chaste and severe English women. What is shocking at home is not shocking abroad. Shocking, (...) we Southerners have no word for that; we have not the thing. You

are a very unhappy people. Your government is a tyranny. There are so many things you may not do. You may not drink if you are thirsty because it is Sunday; you may not play a little game of cards in a café with a friend; you may not finish your supper because a policeman says you must go to bed. That is, I suppose, why you go abroad so much. You do not understand how to attain liberty at home; but you long for it, and you enjoy it very much abroad. And then you go back to your uncomfortable prison, and do what the policeman tells you.²⁰

Braintree supposes that it is rather a matter of being illogical than anything else for if one could bet the amount one wished on horses, why should one not be able to do the same with other games. But, despite being illogical, it worked pretty well. To this Donna Consuelo remarked

That is delightful, and it is truly English. 'It is illogical, but it works pretty well.' You do not care *un fétu* for logic; you care for what works pretty well. We others, we must have logic, even if it works pretty badly. That is the secret of your success. That is why your Constitution is so much better than all the others. Now you are going to try to make it logical, and it will not work at all. But, luckily for yourselves, you will not succeed. You cannot do it. *Vous n'en avez pas le moyen.*²¹

Another important aspect concerning Braintree in the novel is that he also grows in the sense that he becomes aware of the importance of certain things which he had not noticed or realized before. Although we are not in the presence of a *Bildungsroman* in its true sense, the difficulties Braintree had to face and overcome enabled him to see that there was more to life than the orderly routine he lead at home, and the contact with this wild conspiracy made it possible for the natural man to reassert himself at once getting rid of the frail barriers within which he had hedged himself. In relation to Helen, he thanked the Heavens for the perils that had brought them so close together even though he greatly cared for her safety. Because of her true companionship, unknown feelings had awoken in him. His 'rather purposeless life was filled with a definite and intense purpose — the purpose which throughout the history of mankind has been the greatest stimulus to man's efforts: the winning of a woman's love'²².

Besides the aspects heretofore focused upon, and to conclude, many others may be found in *The Ace of Hearts*. Stanford's 1912 novel is full of references of the city of Funchal, its people in their daily chores, the arrival and departure of steamers, not to mention the island's natural beauties. Those who wish to better understand the island of Madeira and its cultural identity at the beginning of this century, may yet find in *The Ace of Hearts* much material for further research.

Notes

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- ¹ Charles Thomas-Stanford, *The Ace of Hearts — A Romance of Today*, London, Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1912, p. 7.
- ² “Os legados do anno velho”, in *Diário de Notícias.*, 1st January 1912, p. 1.
- ³ “Traidores!...”, in *O Povo*, 6th January 1912, p. 1.
- ⁴ “Phantasias Negras - O Que Aconteceria em Lisboa se Vingasse a Conspiração Monarchica”, in *Diário da Madeira*, 5th January 1912, p. 1.
- ⁵ “União Republicana”, in *Diário de Notícias*, 19th January 1912, p. 1.
- ⁶ “Portugal no Estrangeiro”, in *Diário de Notícias*, 8th January 1912, p. 2.
- ⁷ “English Section”, in *Diário da Madeira*, 26th January 1912, p. 3.
- ⁸ “Um Padre autuado por criticar as leis da República”, in *Diário de Notícias*, 3rd January 1912, p. 1.
- ⁹ “Fuga de Conspiradores”, in *Diário de Notícias*, 5th January 1912, p. 2.
- ¹⁰ “Lista dos Estrangeiros”, in *Diário de Notícias*, 1st January 1912, p. 3.
- ¹¹ “Diário Elegante”, in *Diário da Madeira*, 9th January 1912, p. 2.
- ¹² Charles Thomas-Stanford, *Leaves From a Madeira Garden*, London, John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1909, p. 7.
- ¹³ *idem*, p. 9.
- ¹⁴ *ibidem*
- ¹⁵ Charles Thomas-Stanford, *The Ace of Hearts - A Romance of Today*, London, Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1912, pp. 89-90.
- ¹⁶ *idem*, p. 265.
- ¹⁷ *idem*, p. 225.
- ¹⁸ *idem*, p. 13.
- ¹⁹ *idem*, p. 278.
- ²⁰ *idem*, pp. 11-12.
- ²¹ *ibidem*
- ²² *idem*, p. 145.