



# ADÍLIA LOPES

(Portugal, 1960)

[Thursday 31 March 2005]

**Adília Lopes self-published her first book, in 1985, under the title *A Rather Dangerous Game*, a fitting epithet for her entire poetic career. The very fact of self-publishing entailed a risk, since it didn't make for easy distribution, and the more than 15 books she has published since then have nearly all been issued by 'alternative' or 'underground' presses – very much on the margin of Portuguese publishing.**

What was truly 'dangerous', however, in terms of forging a career, was the poetry itself. It had apparently little to do with the Portuguese poetic tradition, though it was firmly rooted in Portuguese culture and language, being full of word games, idioms, references to Portuguese proverbs, sayings, children's songs and historical events, as well as frequent citations or borrowings from other national (and international) writers. But was it worthwhile as poetry? Many readers and critics had their doubts, but Adília Lopes seems to be winning the game. She has a strong and loyal following, not only in Portugal but also in Brazil, and some important critics and academics have taken up her cause. Others, meanwhile, continue to throw up their hands in exasperation.

As a young woman Maria José de Oliveira, born in Lisbon, battled with profound depression. When she emerged, she adopted her banal-sounding pseudonym – Adília Lopes – and began publishing poetry. Though the first poem of her first book evokes Esther Greenwood, the narrator of Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, and a later poem evokes a persona of Anne Sexton named Elizabeth, Adília Lopes doesn't write for therapeutic purposes, and her poetry, despite its candor, is not of the confessional variety. Her subject matter is much broader: the world, and her relationship with it. Put that way, the observation is trite: it could apply to the majority of poets. The difference is that Lopes writes about the world as she knows it (and this includes her childhood memories and extensive readings) in the crudest terms, without any attempt to aestheticize it or to endow her verses with a lofty aura.

Just about anything can go into an Adília Lopes poem, including material from other writers who aren't necessarily identified. In 'Elisabeth Doesn't Work Here Anymore', an epigraph does note that it contains a "few things" from Anne Sexton: various lines, it turns out, from 'You, Doctor Martin', which Lopes has "doctored" for her own, very different sort of poem, set in a beauty parlor rather than a mental hospital. This is one of Lopes's most emotionally charged poems; many others seem merely whimsical. "A bad poem kills no one," she writes in 'Pleasures and Displeasures', and she doesn't seem very concerned to write 'great' poems.

So what is poetry for Adília Lopes? A number of her poems mention entropy ('Childhood Memories', for instance), and her poetic oeuvre may seem, at first glance, like a kingdom of entropy, but in fact her poetry is an attempt to counteract chaos, to establish some order, make connections, put things back together. This recalls the ambition of Sophia de Mello Breyner, a poet much admired by Lopes, but whereas the former longed for prelapsarian perfection, the latter is more pragmatic: she'll settle for a makeshift whole and doesn't mind chips and dents. Sophia assumed the voice of an oracle; Adília calls herself a housekeeper ('The Housekeeper' is the title of one of her recent books), engaged in trying to straighten out some of the world's (and her own) confusion. Housecleaning, not therapy.

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## **POEMS**

**CANDY**

**CHILDHOOD MEMORIES**

**CURLPAPERS**

**ELISABETH DOESN'T WORK HERE ANYMORE**

**I DON'T LIKE BOOKS**

**MAKING MY PEACE WITH MEMORIES**

**PENELOPE**

**PLEASURES AND DISPLEASURES**

**THIRTY-YEAR-OLD WOMAN**

**WEATHER REPORT**

## Candy

She dropped the photograph  
and when a stranger ran up from behind  
to give it to her  
she refused to touch it  
but you dropped it miss  
I couldn't have dropped it  
because it isn't mine  
she didn't want anyone  
and especially not a stranger  
to suspect there was any relation  
between her and the photograph  
it was as if she'd dropped  
a blood-soaked handkerchief  
because she was the one in the photograph  
and nothing belongs to us more than blood  
which is why when someone pricks their finger  
they stick it right in their mouth to suck the  
blood  
the stranger understood  
it's a picture of you miss  
it may be a picture of someone who looks just  
like me  
but it isn't me  
the stranger was a kind person  
he didn't insist  
and since he knew beggars  
don't have money for taking pictures  
he gave the photograph to a beggar  
who ate it up like candy

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## Um figo

Deixou cair a fotografia  
um desconhecido correu atrás dela  
para lha entregar  
ela recusou-se a pegar na fotografia  
mas a senhora deixou cair isto  
eu não posso ter deixado cair isto  
porque isto não é meu  
não queria que ninguém  
e sobretudo um desconhecido  
suspeitasse que havia uma relação  
entre ela e a fotografia  
era como se tivesse deixado cair  
um lenço cheio de sangue  
porque era ela quem estava na fotografia  
e nada nos pertence tanto como o sangue  
por isso quando uma pessoa se pica num dedo  
leva logo o dedo à boca para chupar o sangue  
o desconhecido apercebeu-se disso  
é um retrato da senhora  
pode ser o retrato de alguém muito parecido  
comigo  
mas não sou eu  
o desconhecido por ser muito bondoso  
não insistiu  
e como sabia que os mendigos  
não têm dinheiro para tirar fotografias  
deu a fotografia a um mendigo  
que lhe chamou um figo

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From: *Obra*

Publisher: Mariposa Azul, Lisbon

## Childhood Memories

We loved raspberry compote  
and we were given a dish with more raspberry  
compote  
than usual  
but  
our maid and our great-aunt  
for our own good  
because we were sick  
had laced the raspberry compote  
with spoonfuls of medicine  
that tasted bad  
the raspberry compote didn't taste the same  
and it had white streaks  
this happened to us once and that was enough  
we never again jumped up and down when  
there was  
raspberry compote for dessert  
we never again jumped up and down for  
anything  
we can't say  
how yucky the medicine from our childhood  
tasted!  
how yummy the raspberry compote from our  
childhood was!  
when we found out about the mixture  
of raspberry compote with the medicine  
we fell silent  
later we heard about entropy  
we learned that it's not easy to separate  
raspberry compote from medicine once they're  
mixed together  
that's how it is in books  
that's how it is in childhood  
and books are like childhood  
which is like Catrina's little doves  
one is mine  
another is yours  
yet another is someone else's

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## Memórias das infâncias

Gostávamos muito de doce de framboesa  
e deram-nos um prato com mais doce de  
framboesa  
do que era costume  
mas  
a nossa criada a nossa tia-avó no doce de  
framboesa  
para nosso bem  
porque estávamos doentes  
esconderam colheres do remédio  
que sabia mal  
o doce de framboesa não sabia à mesma coisa  
e tinha fiapos brancos  
isso aconteceu-nos uma vez e chegou  
nunca mais demos pulos por ir haver  
doce de framboesa à sobremesa  
nunca mais demos pulos nenhuns  
não podemos dizer  
como o remédio da nossa infância sabia mal!  
como era doce o doce de framboesa da nossa  
infância!  
ao descobrir a mistura  
do doce de framboesa com o remédio  
ficámos calados  
depois ouvimos falar da entropia  
aprendemos que não se separa de graça  
o doce de framboesa do remédio misturados  
é assim nos livros  
é assim nas infâncias  
e os livros são como as infâncias  
que são como as pombinhas da Catrina  
uma é minha  
outra é tua  
outra é doutra pessoa

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Publisher: Mariposa Azul, Lisbon

## Curlpapers

We'll never cry enough  
for having wanted to be beautiful  
at all costs  
I wanted to be beautiful  
and I thought ringlets would be enough  
to make me beautiful  
I asked to have my hair done in ringlets  
using a curling iron and curlpapers  
they pulled my hair this way and that  
I screamed  
they told me that to be beautiful  
you have to suffer  
then my hair got all burnt  
and wouldn't grow back  
I had to start going around with a wig  
you have to suffer to be beautiful  
but suffering doesn't necessarily make us  
beautiful  
suffering doesn't imply a reward  
as a logical consequence  
a toothache may stir pity in our mother  
who to soothe us but not knowing for what  
gives us a piece of candy  
but the candy makes our teeth hurt even more  
the consequence of suffering  
can be more suffering  
the cause following the effect  
the motive for suffering being one of the  
consequences  
of the suffering  
curlpapers being a consequence of the wig

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## Os papelotes

Nunca choraremos bastante  
termos querido ser belas  
à viva força  
eu quis ser bela  
e julguei que para ser bela  
bastava usar canudos  
pedi para me fazerem canudos  
com um ferro de frisar e papelotes  
puxaram-me muito pelos cabelos  
eu gritei  
disseram-me para ser bela  
é preciso sofrer  
depois o cabelo queimou-se  
não voltou a crescer  
tive de passar a andar com uma peruca  
para ser bela é preciso sofrer  
mas sofrer não nos faz forçosamente belas  
um sofrimento não implica como consequência  
uma recompensa  
uma dor de dentes pode comover a nossa mãe  
que para nos consolar sem saber de quê  
nos dá um rebuçado  
mas o rebuçado ainda nos faz doer mais os  
dentes  
a consequência de um sofrimento  
pode ser outro sofrimento  
a causa é posterior ao efeito  
o motivo do sofrimento é uma das  
consequências  
do sofrimento  
os papelotes são uma consequência da peruca

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## Elisabeth Doesn't Work Here Anymore

*(with a few things from Anne Sexton)*

I've already walked from breakfast to madness  
I've already gotten sick on studying morse code  
and drinking coffee with milk  
I can't do without Elisabeth  
why did you fire her madam doctor?  
what harm was Elisabeth doing me?  
I only like Elisabeth  
to wash my hair  
I can't stand to have you touch my hair doctor  
I only come here doctor  
for Elisabeth to wash my hair  
only she knows the colors and scents and  
thickness  
I like in shampoos  
only she knows how I like the water almost cold  
running down the back of my head  
I can't do without Elisabeth  
don't try to tell me that time heals all wounds  
I was counting on her for the rest of my life  
Elisabeth was the princess of all the foxes  
I needed her hands in my hair  
ah if only there were knives for cutting your  
throat madam doctor I'm not coming back  
to your antiseptic tunnel  
once I was beautiful now I'm myself  
I don't want to be a ranter and alone  
again in the tunnel what did you do to  
Elisabeth?  
Elisabeth was the princess of all the foxes  
why did you take Elisabeth away from me?  
Elisabeth doesn't work here anymore  
is that all you have to say to me doctor  
with a sentence like that in my head  
I don't want to go back to my life

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## A Elisabeth foi-se embora

*(com algumas coisas de Anne Sexton)*

Eu que já fui do pequeno-almoço à loucura  
eu que já adoeci a estudar morse  
e a beber café com leite  
não posso passar sem a Elisabeth  
porque é que a despediu senhora doutora?  
que mal me fazia a Elisabeth?  
eu só gosto que seja a Elisabeth  
a lavar-me a cabeça  
não suporto que a senhora doutora me toque na  
cabeça  
eu só venho cá senhora doutora  
para a Elisabeth me lavar a cabeça  
só ela sabe as cores os cheiros a viscosidade  
de que eu gosto nos shampoos  
só ela sabe como eu gosto da água quase fria  
a escorrer-me pela cabeça abaixo  
eu não posso passar sem a Elisabeth  
não me venha dizer que o tempo cura tudo  
contava com ela para o resto da vida  
a Elisabeth era a princesa das raposas  
precisava das mãos dela na minha cabeça  
ah não haver facas que lhe cortem o  
pescoço senhora doutora eu não volto  
ao seu anti-séptico túnel  
já fui bela uma vez agora sou eu  
não quero ser barulhenta e sozinha  
outra vez no túnel o que fez à Elisabeth?  
a Elisabeth foi-se embora  
é só o que tem para me dizer senhora doutora  
com uma frase dessas na cabeça  
eu não quero voltar à minha vida

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Publisher: Mariposa Azual, Lisbon

## **I don't like books**

I don't like books  
as much  
as Mallarmé seems  
to have liked them  
I'm not a book  
and when people say  
I really like your books  
I wish I could say  
like the poet Cesariny  
listen  
what I'd really like  
is for you to like me  
books aren't made  
of flesh and blood  
and when I feel  
like crying  
it doesn't help  
to open a book  
I need a hug  
but thank God  
the world isn't a book  
and chance doesn't exist  
still and all I really like  
books  
and believe in the Resurrection  
of books  
and believe that in Heaven  
there are libraries  
and reading and writing

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Não gosto tanto  
de livros  
como Mallarmé  
parece que gostava  
eu não sou um livro  
e quando me dizem  
gosto muito dos seus livros  
gostava de poder dizer  
como o poeta Cesariny  
olha  
eu gostava  
é que tu gostasses de mim  
os livros não são feitos  
de carne e osso  
e quando tenho  
vontade de chorar  
abrir um livro  
não me chega  
preciso de um abraço  
mas graças a Deus  
o mundo não é um livro  
e o acaso não existe  
no entanto gosto muito  
de livros  
e acredito na Ressurreição  
dos livros  
e acredito que no Céu  
haja bibliotecas  
e se possa ler e escrever

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## **Making my Peace with Memories**

In the mirror I see myself  
pieced together with glue  
more beautiful  
than before  
like the Zen plate  
whose fractures  
are highlighted  
with gold  
I'm the work of good  
and bad luck  
the work of affection  
and the lack of it  
Narcissus and anti-Narcissus  
living is believing

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## **Reconciliada com as memórias**

Eu no espelho  
colada com cola  
mais bela  
do que dantes  
como o prato Zen  
que tem as fracturas  
sublinhadas  
com ouro  
obra da fortuna  
má e boa  
obra da falta de afecto  
e do afecto  
Narciso e anti-Narciso  
viver para crer

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## **Penelope**

1  
Penelope  
is a spider  
that spins  
a web  
the web is Penelope's  
Odyssey

2  
Penelope is  
always  
sitting down

3  
Ulysses is abstract  
Penelope is concrete  
the web is abstract  
and concrete

1  
Penélope  
é uma aranha  
que faz  
uma teia  
a teia é a Odisseia  
de Penélope

2  
Penélope está  
sempre  
sentada

3  
Ulisses é abstracto  
Penélope é concreta  
a teia é abstracta  
e concreta



4  
Penelope gets married  
to Homer  
Ulysses  
never lands

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### **Pleasures and displeasures**

Pleasures and displeasures  
lead to the poem  
as they might lead  
to the precipice  
the poem speaks of the precipice  
where there will be weeping  
and gnashing of teeth  
and there won't be Kleenex  
or Dr. Abílio Loff  
my dear dentist  
the poem speaks of the precipice  
averted in the nick of time  
a bad poem kills no one  
(a living donkey is worth more  
than a dead wise man)

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### **Thirty-year-old Woman**

You'll love  
my shiny  
nose  
my stretch marks  
my blackheads  
my writings  
my ailments  
my quirks  
and my cats that go  
with being a spinster  
or else you won't love me

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4  
Penélope casa-se  
com Homero  
Ulisses fica a ver  
navios

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Os gostos e os desgostos  
levam ao poema  
como podem levar  
ao precipício  
o poema fala do precipício  
lá haverá choro  
e ranger de dentes  
e não haverá Kleenex  
nem o Dr. Abílio Loff  
o meu querido dentista  
o poema fala do precipício  
evitado a tempo  
o mau poema não mata  
(mais vale burro vivo  
que sábio morto)

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### **La femme de trente ans**

Amarás  
o meu nariz  
brilhante  
as minhas estrias  
os meus pontos pretos  
os meus textos  
os meus achaques  
e as minhas manias  
e as minhas gatas  
de solteirona  
ou não me amarás

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## Weather Report

God didn't give me  
a boyfriend  
he gave me  
the white martyrdom  
of doing without one

I've known some potential  
boyfriends  
they were swine  
they were elephants  
and me pearls  
and crystal

You don't want me  
you never did  
(why, for God's sake?)

Life  
is free  
and the book  
isn't free

I cry  
it rains  
but that's  
Verlaine

Or:  
such a beautiful  
day  
and I'm not  
fornicating

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Publisher: Mariposa Azual, Lisbon

## Meteorológica

Deus não me deu  
um namorado  
deu-me  
o martírio branco  
de não o ter

Vi namorados  
possíveis  
foram bois  
foram porcos  
e eu palácios  
e pérolas

Não me queres  
nunca me quiseste  
(porquê, meu Deus?)

A vida é livro  
e o livro  
não é livre

Choro  
chove  
mas isto é  
Verlaine

Ou:  
um dia tão bonito  
e eu  
não fornico

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From: *Obra*

Publisher: Mariposa Azual, Lisbon

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#### **Links**

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