

para tudo isso como se as coisas se passassem e ele com consciência, como se ouvisse o rumor da noite em que o velavam, o lauto Abel no cemitério, as pazadas de terra a cair o irreparável dos vermes.

para não gritar. Nunca suspeitara a vida pudesse deixar de fin- como um prédio de séculos; errer; as confissões ao padre dava conta a Deus dos hipótese remota de julga- ainda na distância e ação possível da justi- na mercearia, mas tempo contado pela morte remorsos. Procurou o edrontada que pedisse

auxílio: peço-

A D. Vicente para um resumo da questão:

— Nem rei nem a morte escapa.

Nem rei nem p... a. Era verdade, morriam todos afinal, o padre, o médico, as senhoras, e a ideia deu-lhe algum consolo; levados à tona do serão, falando outra vez do despacho contrário ao dr. Neto, mal podiam supor o que se adivinhava por trás deles; a mulher, por exemplo, que ignorara há pouco o seu pedido: deixa lá, Maria, não preciso de ti, descobri-te o segredo, a fragilidade, ir como os outros, com a cal e o abandono dos outros, mas a alma?, porque há também a alma, será

## *Sights from the South*

Portuguese literature 4

OCTOBER 2004



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Portuguese literature 4

OCTOBER 2004

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# *summary*

## *5 introduction*

### *fiction*

- 6* Carlos de Oliveira
- 14* Rui Nunes
- 20* Teresa Veiga

### *poetry*

- 24* Daniel Faria
- 30* Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen

### *essay*

- 36* Daniel Sampaio
  - 42* Maria Filomena Molder
-



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# introduction

This is the fourth number of the review *Sights from the South*, whose aim is to give prominence each year to particular works on the Portuguese literary landscape. In this number, we take a longer look at the authors' words, increasing the length of the excerpts. At the same time, we give children's and young people's literature their rightful space, highlighting them in the publication Portuguese Children's Books, in April of each year.

Every year is special, and this one is certainly memorable. In July the poet Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen died after eighty-five years of exploring and revealing the locus of love and freedom. We open the way to Sophia's poetry in this number of *Sights* through Richard Zenith's translations.

If we were to look for the common ground occupied by the selections that appear in this review, we could probably use the words of the poet Daniel Faria and talk about "places in the wrong place" (*Homens que são como lugares mal situados* / Men who are like places in the wrong place). The characters, time, situation, the wordcraft, all seem to create their own peculiar, strange and unique time. The approach adopted by essayists Maria Filomena Molder and Daniel Sampaio in the fields of philosophy and psychology, is also in some ways concerned with the "flaws" of those places where men site themselves.

This is your invitation to explore them in the pages that follow.

October 2004

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## Carlos de Oliveira

The son of Portuguese emigrants, he was born in Brazil (Belém do Pará) in 1921, where he lived for just two years.

Returning to Portugal, he settled in the rural interior, when Salazar's dictatorship's was at its height. He studied at Coimbra University where he obtained a degree in History and Philosophy. Poet, novelist, journalist and translator, his work was characterised by his pursuit of purity and his perfectionism, as well as an unequalled style and poetic awareness. One of the most important writers on the Portuguese literary scene in the twentieth century, Carlos de Oliveira died in Lisbon in 1981.

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## *A bee in the rain* *Uma abelha na chuva*



The Carlos de Oliveira linked aesthetically and ideologically to the Neo-Realist movement (*Uma Abelha na Chuva* of 1953 [A bee in the rain] was considered the canonical example of such a relationship), was to be followed by yet another Carlos de Oliveira, one who had thrown off in whole or at least in part, the programmatic principles of this literary movement. This chronological sequence does not, however, aid understanding of the developments and internal historicity of Carlos de Oliveira's work. In the first place, because the author never stopped re-writing his books, responding to the demands of a "protracted job which, once completed, could be "undone, redone, refined" (...). In the second place, because there is no text by Carlos de Oliveira which does not bring with it the memory of the previous work. An extreme example of this is his last novel, *Finisterra*, which, though deploying new narrative mechanisms, still echoes and dialogues with Oliveira's poetry and previous novels, especially *House in the sand*.

António Guerreiro  
in *Expresso*, 18.10.2003

I  
Around five o'clock on a chilly October afternoon a traveller entered Corgos on foot. It was the end of a difficult journey that had taken him from the village of Montouro over bad roads to the solid pavement of the larger town. The man was short and fat, and he moved slowly. He wore a sheepskin coat with a fur collar and a dark wide-brimmed hat. His tight-fitting shirt and lack of a tie did not detract from the overall impression of fastidiousness that he gave, from his clean hands to his clipped beard. True, his calf-length boots were spattered with mud, but it was clear that this man did not ordinarily frequent muddy places: he stomped his feet in irritation to get the muck off them. There was something peculiar about him: the weight of his thick upper body bowed his legs, so he waddled like a duck. He seemed to collapse with every step. His labored breathing slowed his progress, but all the same he had walked two leagues over rough terrain, through mud, in the freezing cold. It must be a serious matter indeed for him to have gone out in this weather, to brave the byways of the province.

A white haze hovered over the town and all along the horizon like the lip of a giant seashell.

It grew gradually darker toward the center, then came together in a high, stormy depression. It was going to rain. The wind brushed the clouds aside, making way for the heavy afternoon showers.

The man sauntered across the square to the Café Atlântico. He wiped his boots thoroughly on the wire doormat, took a seat, and ordered a brandy, which he drank in a single gulp: he was a man who moved slowly, and this was the only thing he did with any speed. He lifted the glass to his gaping mouth, paused for a moment, then tossed the liquor down his throat. He did this a second time, then a third, paid, and left the café. He went back across the park, rhythmically pounding his heels into the pavement to shake off the last bits of mud, and headed toward the office of the "Corgos Herald". His lumbering pace never changed, as if the same wind that sent the rotting sycamore leaves scudding over the ground labored also to move him along.

## II

Medeiros, the editor of the "Herald", had a dark, uncomfortable office containing a cheap pine desk, two or three chairs with cane seats, a glass-bead chandelier dangling from the ceiling, and piles of newspapers in the corners. It smelled dusty, like a road in summer.

"Take a seat, please".

The visitor sat down, opened his wallet, and removed a carefully folded sheet of paper.

"For the next issue of the paper, if possible. I'll pay any price".

Medeiros unfolded the paper, smoothed the folds one by one with a very long thumbnail like a guitar player's, and began to read. Almost immediately he looked up with a shocked expression:

"I beg your pardon: you want me to print this thing in the 'Herald'?"

The other lowered his blank face.

"Exactly".

Medeiros pushed the papers on his desk to one side as if he needed air, adjusted his glasses on his narrow nose, and read the document again in the hope of having misunderstood it. He hadn't. There it was, the startling confession, inscribed in green ink by a shaky hand:

I, Álvaro Rodrigues Silvestre, farmer and merchant in Montouro, Saint Caetano parish, township of Corgos, swear on my honor that all my life I have stolen from men on this earth and also from God in heaven, when I was the steward for Our Lady of Montouro and took the left-over corn that the faithful had tithed to her, for my own use. In my defense I also swear that I committed these many thefts at the urging of my wife, Dona Maria dos Prazeres Pessoa de Alva Sancho Silvestre, skimming from the till, from market sales, from the workers' pay, and from my brother Leopoldino's inheritance, of which I am the trustee: I sold off his pine woods without him knowing about it, and now he is coming back from Africa and I can't give him an honest accounting.

The remission of my sin begins with this public confession. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, may I be forgiven by whomever has it in his power to forgive.

Medeiros's jaw dropped. The second reading had made the same impression as the first. He could understand somebody inflating prices a little, he could even understand how one could stoop to stealing bushels of wheat from Our Lady. As for taking advantage of his power of attorney to sell a half-dozen lots of pine trees, how could he not understand this, too – temptations are temptations, for God's sake! But to go public with it on the front page of a newspaper? To grasp something like this was for

## BY THE AUTHOR

Selected Works

### Fiction

*A casa na duna.* 1943; 2000 [House in the sand]

*Pequenos Burgueses.* 1948; 2000 [Petits bourgeois]

*Uma abelha na chuva.* 1953; 2003 [A bee in the rain]

*O aprendiz de feiticeiro.* 1971; 2003 [The sorcerer's apprentice]

*Finisterra. Paisagem e povoamento.* 1978; 2003 [Finisterra. Landscape and population]

### Poetry

*Trabalho poético.* 1976; 2003 [Poetic work]



## SELECTED TRANSLATIONS

### French

*Finisterre. Paysage et peuplement.*

Translated by Pelletier. Albi: Passage du Nord/Ouest, 2003

*Petits Bourgeois.* Translated by Adrien

Roig. Paris: José Corti, 1991

*Une Abeille sous la pluie.* Translated by

Adrien Roig. Paris: José Corti, 1989

### German

*Eine Biene im Regen.* Translated by Curt

Mayer-Clason. Freiburg: Beck und Glückler, 1989

*Haus auf der Düne.* Translated by Curt

Mayer-Clason. Freiburg: Beck und Glückler, 1989

*Kleinbürger.* Translated by Curt Mayer-

Clason. Freiburg: Beck und Glückler, 1991

### Spanish

*Micropaisaje.* Translated by Ángel

Campos Pâmpano. València: Pré-textos, 1987

### Italian

*Finisterra.* Translated by Giulia Lanciani.

Aquila: Japadre, 1983

Medeiros like beating his head against a stone wall.

Once again he looked straight into the farmer's bloated face. The sleepy, blank expression. All the same, there was a kind of gravity in those lazy eyes: there was something in the soft line of the mouth, the slightly drooping lower lip, and the graying temples that kept the journalist from simply writing the man off as a moron. And yet it was hard to see it in any other light. Obviously he couldn't print the confession just like that. It was a serious matter, other people were involved, the man might well be a fool, and the family could make demands, issue denials, stir up trouble.

"I gather you intend to make a public act of contrition".

"I do. On the front page, in really large print, if possible".

"May I know why?"

The man shifted in the chair. He had placed his hat on his knees and was stroking it with his fat white fingers.

"A man has to settle his accounts with God and other men. Especially with God".

"Of course. One has to have these things in order. What else?"

"The other thing is, it's hell to carry this stuff around inside. Weighing you down, gnawing at you".

The editor of the "Herald" removed his glasses and placed them carefully in their silver case.

"Know what I would do if I were you? I'd find a priest and get it off my chest. Confession, you know...."

"I've already confessed, but it isn't enough. I've thought about it a lot, and Father Abel isn't enough".

"Nevertheless, confession is a big relief, and it prevents scandals and things of that nature".

The man rested his waxen hands in the crown of his hat:

"God writes straight in crooked lines. Maybe a scandal is what he wants".

Almost immediately he added:

"Can we agree on it, then? The next issue of the 'Herald', front page, round type like the ads. How much will it set me back?"

The newspaper man insisted:

"Why not handle it in private? Pay your brother back, talk to Father Abel, settle matters with Our Lady, take care of it that way".

His urgings were met with the same question:

"So how much will it set me back?"

He spoke clearly, with ease. Medeiros felt the weight of these words. He knew he was fighting an uphill battle, but he had to say something, and so he asked:

"What about your wife? What does she think about all this?"

The farmer half rose out of his chair. His blank face came alive in a complex series of ticks, scowls, and furtive glances. He seemed frightened. Medeiros watched as he eventually settled back in his chair with the air of someone who has managed to rid himself of an ugly thought.

"God forbid she should know about it".

"She's sure to know when the paper comes out".

He shrugged his shoulders and for the first time smiled.

"I don't care any more. You know what they say: 'You can't beat a dead horse'".

Something else came to him.

"It would be awful if she found out and kept me from confessing".

His rapped the top of Medeiros's desk with his knuckles.

"Let's hope she never finds out. Knock on wood".

### III

Before the downpour reached the pavement, a horse-drawn trap sped silently into town. The bay mare foamed in the traces. The driver, a tall red-headed man, halted the carriage in front of the Café Atlântico and leapt from his seat to do the bidding of the carriage's owner, a pale middle-aged woman wearing a wool shawl, with a blanket over her knees.

"Ask if they saw him in the café".

The redhead quickly returned with the information:

"He was here, and fifteen minutes ago he went to the newspaper office".

"The newspaper?"

"Yes, ma'am".

"That's where we're going", she said a little hoarsely.

The carriage went around the square and stopped at the "Herald". The woman gave the blanket a shake, and the driver helped her to the pavement.

"Go water the horse. Don't take too long".

While the redhead climbed back on his seat, she pushed open the door to the office. She strode into the waiting room and asked Medeiros's assistant if a short, fat man in a sheep-skin coat had been there. The young man pointed to the office, and in she went.

Caught off guard, Medeiros leapt to his feet. Álvaro Silvestre swiveled his thick neck with some difficulty and when he saw who was there jumped to the journalist's desk with unexpected speed, grabbed the written confession, crumpled it up as fast as he could, and shoved it in his coat pocket. The series of sudden movements left him reeling. His hat fell to the ground, and he couldn't decide whether to pick it up or to say something. His legs got tangled, and he fell back helplessly into the chair. The woman smiled:

"It seems I'm interrupting. Aren't you going to introduce me, Álvaro?"

But her husband had withdrawn into a shell of terrified silence, so she introduced herself:

"Maria dos Prazeres Pessoa de Alva Sancho... Silvestre".

She made a point of setting her husband's surname apart. Medeiros sputtered:

"Pl...pleased to meet you". He gestured toward a chair.

"You, sir, are the editor of the 'Herald'?"

Still smiling, she scrutinized the worn office furniture. The white lace ruff of her dark velvet dress gently caressed her neck, like a delicate foam necklace. Fluffy sleeves fell to her wrists, where they ended in the same bright, discrete whiteness, from which her long, stringy hands emerged. It was all rather out of date, but it suited her, made her slender, and there was something dramatic about the contrast between the severity of her dress and the whiteness of her complexion. Prominent cheekbones, black hair gathered into thick tresses that curled on her neck, full lips and big, lively, almost anxious eyes. The pearl-gray shawl draped over her shoulders lent a note of unexpected intimacy to her appearance. The journalist nevertheless found that there was something about this splendid woman that left him cold: was it the ironic smirk, the penetrating gaze, the chilling, scornful voice? He did not know for sure, and so undertook a prudent assessment. This was some woman, no doubt about it, but what a handful!

A little more calmly, he announced:

"João Medeiros, madam, at your service".

In the meantime Dona Maria dos Prazeres had taken a seat. She pointed to her husband's muddy boots:

"Look at your boots, for heaven's sake!"

He tried in vain to hide his feet under the chair, but she was up in arms again:

"And you didn't wear a tie!"

He raised his hand to his throat but froze halfway, in an almost childlike attitude of fear. Flustered and indecisive, he left his hand suspended in mid-air. She went on:

"You realize, Mr. Medeiros, that he came from Montouro on foot despite the weather. When he has a carriage, horses, and a driver at home! He's a fifty year-old baby! I can't imagine why he's come. Whatever the reason, he is obviously unwell. He has strange ideas – this must be taken into account. What he says is simply not to be believed."

The man bent over to pick up the hat that had fallen when she walked in the room. He groaned in humiliation:

"Stop, Maria".



"The doctor told him to give up his business, his properties," she continued, oblivious to everything else. "Rest and relaxation. So today the rest, the relaxation, are two leagues of mud, through the middle of nowhere, in the teeth of a storm".

Outside, the rain came crashing down at last. They could hear it beating on the windows. The journalist took advantage of the distraction to change the topic.

"Quite a downpour. Here it comes".

Álvaro Silvestre hastened to agree:

"It's quite a storm".

But she kept hammering away:

"'Quite a storm' that could have caught you outdoors. Did you think of that?"

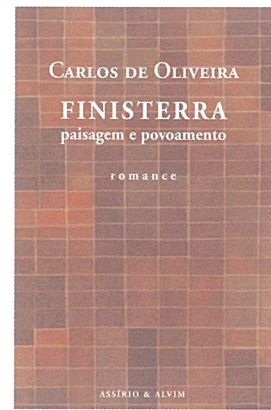
Despondently he closed his eyes: shut up, Maria, shut up. Medeiros got up and went to the window to look at the streams of steaming water. What a pair!

Translated by Ken Krabbenhoft

Excerpt from *Uma abelha na chuva* (1953)

Lisbon: Assírio & Alvim, 2003, 136 pp.

## *Finisterra. Landscape and population* *Finisterra. Paisagem e povoamento*



The familiar garden (first stage of disrepair): brambles in shapeless mounds, untrimmed boxwood, nettles, wildflowers. Stunted palm trees, so swollen they look like aging, diseased dwarfs, their long hair and matted leaves bent to touch the ground.

Perched on a whale bone, more correctly the middle section of a whale's backbone, fifty-five centimeters wide and thirty-three high: two vertebrae spread open like the blades (arms) of a propeller, quite far apart, providing a resting place for the elbows. Balancing the sketchpad on his knees he is able to draw (pretty soon the summer rain will send him indoors). Whale bone, the texture of softwood, waterlogged and weatherbeaten but free of rot: when light strikes its muted grain it raises a gray power, as if re-igniting. The stone hardness relents, and they both float (the child and the whale bone) above the bilious moss, the stalks of gisandra, the lichen – these lingering afflictions.

A clashing in the clouds catches him by surprise then fades away, but it is enough to open a crack (irreparable) in his memory, and he reproduces the landscape outside his window, from memory. He shapes primordial beings, mixes summer and winter, tones down the blinding (excessive) summer sunlight that strikes the sand, crushed mica, mortar-ground glass (whatever), swells the grains of sand to the size they seem to have at night when the wind throws fat fistfuls of pebbles at the windows. At this point the rain drives him from the garden. Not much time for floating.

Outside, from the walls up, there is a brief stretch of clear, almost translucent air (it grows stronger bit by bit): a glow engulfing the house, mysteriously protecting it (?). Beyond the glow the atmosphere is dark, a slowly revolving weight. Danger is on the way.

In the living room, the man gets up from the yellowwood table and examines the window: a chestnut frame and hinges of aging iron support the panes, which have many imperfections (bubbles and bumps distort the view) but are sufficiently thick and sturdy.

I have to measure the rooms, one by one: length, width, ceiling height. Find out how exposed they are to the fog, which parts are most vulnerable (windows, doors, and shutters). Take a closer look at the worn wax on the floors and the shadows that lurk in the termite-infested hallways, and the dust, and the mildew on the ceilings, the wood turned to sawdust in the middle. On a drenched afternoon like this one note the subtle diapason of the gutters, the ever-weaker daylight: how does it absorb the furniture's whispers?

The measuring tape should be in the upper right-hand dresser drawer, where it has always been; I can see the key from here: a nickel flame swaying in the highest drawer's lock. Carefully calculate how much room there is for me to move in, how far things are apart, the exact location of the chairs. Ramble about the house in the middle of the night, in the dark, without bumping into anything.

The child views the landscape, sitting in a rocking chair (old mahogany, near the window, its high back turned to the facing halves of the double-door that swings on iron hinges). Tiny eyes squinting in the violence of outdoor light.

The nearest sandy area (its silvery breath boils like salt on old roads: reddish on the inside, on the outside white) fills the lower third of the parched land framed by the window.

Next comes a narrow strip of grass: as the pond (deep purple reeds) evaporates, it dips the grass in a tone that is heavier than that of the water itself. This is a fairly changeable spot, however: as the sun sets the intensity of the color constantly changes: a puff of wind or the almost imperceptible wavelike motion that it creates is enough to shade the grass lighter or darker.

On the far shore, the shape of the dunes reflects this wavelike motion (a faint sine curve tracing the outline of the second large zone of sand) and defines the landscape's middle zone.

The final third ends at the upper edge of the sash: in it, the distant dunes (sharply defined, shimmering whitewash like the halo or vibration that the stars steadily project). A patch of blue in the background might be equally sea or sky, a blazing sheet of zinc or merely a hazy reflection of light.

He gets up and looks at the photo enlargement pinned to the wall (by the window), which shows this very same landscape: its frame structures it in a similar way, but it lacks true colors, and time has erased the image: the contrasts are hard to make out, the three different zones have run together into a single brown (almost sepia) splotch as the years (and the feeble sunlight that strikes the wall in late afternoon) have devoured their contours, line by line. The landscape is still recognizable, but everything is covered by a film of lazy moonlight that lurks (as in nineteenth-century red-ink drawings) on the far side of the last line of dunes.

After a while he goes over to the tooled-calf cushion (it covers the back of the chair behind the yellowwood table) and smooths out its wrinkles, one by one. The heated point of the stylus never left the leather, wove a dark-brown web on the lighter brown material. It is like an abstract engrav-

ing, it carefully mimics the outline of the dunes, the edge of the pond, the tangled net of grass, geometrically balancing surfaces, volumes, spatial relations: the landscape's true architecture.

The man leafs through the school notebook left on the yellowwood table (the glow that engulfs the house also falls on it, brings out its satin finish: grooves and grain in almost imperceptible waves). The family obsession continues: the child, sitting on the whale bone, has also tried to reproduce this landscape without being too literal. He has drawn from memory, amidst the wildflowers, moved by the thunder that split the clouds.

The colored pencils have changed the proportions and the colors (too much blue, a lot of red, some purple, no yellow at all), but they have given life to the desolation (sand, water, sun and photographic moonlight): the original men, horses, cattle, sheep, appear outlined in black (except for the heads, which are splashes of fire), struggling to walk between grains of sand as big as boulders. They want to slake their thirst in a pond not much bigger than a raindrop. Overhead, above the distant dunes, white birds hover, their wings touching the edges of the paper, clearly waiting their turn to drink.

The glowing light (which delays the danger that threatens the house), even the ringing in the gutters, now imbue the drawing with the brilliance of a struck match.

"Shall I begin?"

"Yes."

"Remember: it's the Truth Game."

"Quod est veritas?"

Awfully precocious.

"All right, Pontius Pilate! But try to be honest. I'm looking at the drawing, pointing to the dark figures, the heads of light."

"Why are they like that?" He pauses. "Hard to explain. Maybe the fever I had every afternoon".

"You went into the garden with a fever?"

"Nobody knew about it. I broke the thermometer on purpose, and before they could buy a new one.... But I'm not positive it was a fever. Around that time there was a flash

of lightning as black as coal. I think it might have struck a town, and maybe that's the meaning of the drawing. Terrified animals and men. Or me, guided by the flash."

He pauses again.

"I was thirsty, too. It hadn't started to rain."

"There were no people in the landscape, in the photo, on the cushion."

"Of course not! I put them in. I mean, I was thinking about them when I put them in the drawing."

"Why is the pond so small?"

"It was going to rain. I probably thought of a raindrop. And I was thirsty, like I said. When you're thirsty, there's never enough water."

"On the other hand, the grains of sand are gigantic."

"The ones that blow against the windows in winter are even bigger."

"Bigger?"

"The grains of sand can explain it."

"Explain what?"

"What happens when it's windy. 'We're sleeping in the dunes, very quietly, dreaming about our favorite fountain, at which point we jump up full of fear. The wind is screaming: *Wake up, grains of sand, wake up!* Go beat against the windows! And so we go, caught up in the whirlwind.' Get it? They receive the order and they go crazy. They fly up, swell up, throw themselves at the window. As big as boulders."

"And the window panes don't break?"

"The sand is hollow inside. They swell up but they're empty."

"Empty, how?"

"There's no stone inside. They do it to scare us. That's all."

"And the grass, and the bedstraw?"

"It wasn't on purpose. I didn't notice till later."

"But you left them in."

"Yes."

"Why?"

He concentrates, his forehead wrinkled, eyes squinting.

"One night Mom came into my room, looked at my crib and saw that I didn't have a head."

"No head?"

"The dim light, the closed curtains of the crib – that's what she saw. She started to scream. It was a big round spider, several inches across, and it covered my entire face. Her screams frightened it. It started to climb out of the crib, but it took too long to reach the ground. The maid came and squashed it with a broom. Not a drop of blood."

"Then what?"

"When its body burst open, the baby spiders poured out. A dozen of them, scattering every which way."

"A dozen?"

"Or more. I don't want to exaggerate."

"I understand."

"Mom kept on screaming, but she managed to pull the curtains aside and see that I had my head back on. She fainted from joy. The spider hadn't eaten my eyes."

"Eaten your eyes?"

"That's what spiders do to children."

"You were lucky."

"Only that time."

"Who told you this story?"

"I was there, wasn't I?"

"You were very little and the spider was very big. You must have exaggerated its size the way you did the grains of sand."

He slowly nods.

"Remember, it was summer. A spider is hopeless against the heat and humidity: all it can do is swell up."

"And the white birds?"

"That's a secret. They'll have to tell you themselves... But I don't think they will."

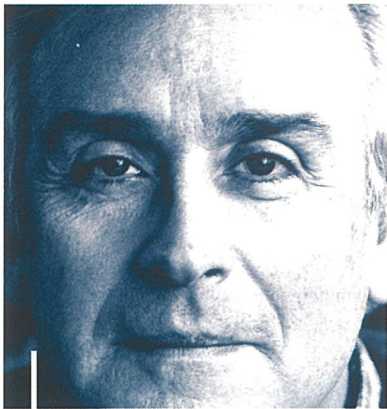
"What about you? Will you tell me?"

"Some day. Maybe."

Translated by Ken Krabbenhoft

Excerpt from *Finisterra. Paisagem e povoamento* (1978)

Lisbon: Assírio & Alvim, 2003, 144 pp.



Luisa Ferreira

## Rui Nunes

Rui Nunes was born in Lisbon in 1945 and studied Philosophy. Remaining at a remove from the most banal aspects of the cultural scene, he is the author of works that are sometimes brutal and at the limits of the tolerable, both unique and unforgettable on the Portuguese literary landscape. In 1997 he was awarded the Portuguese Writers' Association Grand Prize for Novel and Novella for his novel *Grito* [Shout].

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## *The mouth in the ashes* *A boca na cinza*

"What in this new book by Rui Nunes tends to the extremes and misleads the narrative representation lies in the monstrousness of the bodies. Everything takes place in a closed universe, interdicted to any sociability, the one of the siblings Sara and Abel, two dwarfs. (...) There is not precisely a story to be told. There are just two bodies to expose. (...) The logic of the exposure is also a logic of blasphemy, of the exhibition of an immanence that (...) cannot be redeemed by a pleasing appearance. (...) Rui Nunes is the most antiplatonic of our writers.

António Guerreiro,  
in *Expresso*, 18.04.2003



(...) the voices in this author's novels speak to each reader, as an individual being, in terms of the actual consciousness of that same reader, leading him to believe, not infrequently, that the world and the things of the world could be otherwise. Rui Nunes' aesthetics is undoubtedly an aesthetics of social challenge, but also a kind of remission (in the dual sense of indulgence and despondency) of human guilt for rejecting and marginalising difference, for acting perversely, for the madness of unbridled, destructive appetite and, because of this, the suffering that ensues in consequence. In contemporary Portuguese literature, no other author succeeds in reaching this level of cognitive power and aesthetic alienation.

(...) A novel to be read in light of the possibility of re-imagining *Las meninas*, and in particular, its most disturbing element, the dwarf Mariborbola (or Sara in *The mouth in the ashes*).

Taken in conjunction with Velázquez's painting, this novel by Rui Nunes presents the reader with the literary response to that dimension of truth which the art historian Kenneth Clark considered to be the essence of *Las meninas*.

Manuel Frias Martins, in *Jornal de Letras*,  
25.06.2003



*(some men speak to god to secret: they are the foolish ones. In their voice there is the horizon of another voice. They spell the words that god spells in his eternal being.*

*some men carry with them a voice to decimate the face they are addressing*

*some voices darken the outlines of a face.)*

From Abel's Diary

1

pain is opening your eyes to the blank walls of the room, it is the labored breathing and the keel-shaped chest rising and falling when i am lying down, the motion that is my life. i shudder and pull the sheet and blanket up to my neck, my head sticks out of the white border as if separated from my shoulders, above the door before me is a transom, through it i see the study ceiling with plaster designs in relief, a moth beats its wings against the glass in blind agitation, nothing moves except the moth, even my staring eyes, and i'm beginning to get scared, i have a terrible fear that the boy won't ever show up again, not that he would run away but that he will die. i know i'll have this fear every night until daylight peeks under the doors and peace fills the room, i call it 'peace' even though it is really exhaustion, a dusty light that buries me, my brother would say: it wraps you in burial cloth, in a brief death from which i emerge to a rhythmic beat of sound: garbage men dragging cans, children thumping down the stairs, cars beeping in the street, and i'll feel the defect of beginning to live again in a halo of sweat, sticky hands clinging to my face, my exposed body – always a caricature – perched on the edge of the bed, swinging my feet to cool them off: this is how i begin the day, with the leisure of a sleep-

walker or a leper. sometimes i wonder: who can i remember? and the time between my mother's death and this morning weighs on me, a place where no one has ever arrived and from which no one has ever departed, maybe a detour for every step ever taken and for every look and for all words, i live with it, it is always behind me, i carry it not the way a snail carries its shell but the way a tired man carries his muddy shoes, shoes splattered with mud, heavy with mud that hinders his steps and binds him to the mud's own death, its shapelessness. everything in me turns to mud: the boy who may never come back, the memory of my mother who will get tired of me, my brother who will lock himself in his room with his magazines, his gluck and his joyce, his life which cares nothing for mine.

she hears the door opening

"morning, sis"

she does not answer

"don't you want to say hello?"

"go away",

she screams

– fear distorts her words,

(i smash one name with the patience of another: i speak.

i survive disasters, not peace)

"sis inflates her memory like a suffocating gas"

"that's why i drink, alcohol distracts me from tragedy"

the heat has collected on the floor and from there rises lazily to the soles of her feet, she feels it smothering her, an animal wrapping itself around her, it is an organic heat, created perhaps by putrefaction, Sara swings her feet in this tepid water, then putting her weight on her hands and using her arms for leverage she changes position, pushing the mattress back

## BY THE AUTHOR

Selected Works

*Sauromaquia* [Sauromachy] Lisbon:  
Relógio d'Água, 1986

*Quem da pátria sai a si mesmo escapa?*  
[What exiled man from self can sunder?]  
Lisbon: Relógio d'Água, 1983

*Osculatriz* [Osculating Line] Lisbon:  
Relógio d'Água, 1992 – Pen Club Prize  
for Fiction

*Álbum de retratos* [Photograph Album]  
Lisbon: Relógio d'Água, 1993

*Que sinos dobram por aqueles que morrem como gado?* [What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?]  
Lisbon: Relógio d'Água, 1995

*Grito* [Shout] Lisbon: Relógio d'Água,  
1997 – Portuguese Writers' Association  
Grand Prize for Novel and Novella

*Cães* [Dogs] Lisbon: Relógio d'Água, 1998

*Rostos* [Faces] Lisbon: Relógio d'Água,  
2001 – Criticism Prize of the Portuguese  
Centre of the International Association  
of Literary Critics

*A boca na cinza* [The mouth in the ashes]  
Lisbon: Relógio d'Água, 2003

## TRANSLATIONS

### Croatian

*Lica* [Faces] Translated by Tatiana Tarbuk  
Zagreb: Meandar, 2004



with her buttocks, the fabric shackle stretches, her movement is the food that fattens it, her heart beats in her parted lips, in the pads of her fingers, in her dangling legs

"don't watch me"

"why? are you ashamed?"

she falls onto the carpet, her feet are big and give her a sense of power, they root her to the house, to the street where she feels invulnerable clinging to the sidewalk, hard to knock down, not a tree but a limpet, a tick, or an octopus, one of those creatures that makes time an endless waiting or expectation. all the same she has few expectations when she's in the street, the house waits for her, her brother doesn't wait for her when she's in the house, the hour after this one awaits her though she doesn't wait for it,

doesn't think forward to the day ahead: a massive cube of air

## 2

she strolls in the garden, the maintenance men are cleaning the pool, there is mud at the bottom where a few fish are floundering, splashing mud on the children's clothes. Sara stares at one of the men, the stain on his crotch, the hands that grasp the broom shaft,

"the dwarf is hot for you"

it was the last straw,

frogs leaping on the lawn,

plump, moving away,

the light gives substance to their shape.

Asphyxiation.

"get these disgusting things off me",

"they can't hurt you",

"i don't care"

"do what the dwarf says",

they say,

"her ladyship the dwarf",

they add.

Laughing.

(someone's face is bent over her,  
the frozen face of the apocalypse?)

who peeled her eyelids back till she felt the pain of not wanting to see?

what word did the razor slash with its crude light?)

the gasoline reek of traffic is suffocating her,  
she covers her mouth with her hand and coughs,

"are you feeling sick, little girl?"

stones are growing in the garden.

Stone by stone.

## 3

here she is between the bed and the dresser, in front of her the wall of light grows brighter every second, a cold blade cutting the room in half, this early in the morning the heat has not yet stirred the dust or set the air in motion, her whole body shivers, she is afraid to step over this blade of glass, to be injured by it. the comforting night is still there on the other side, so she takes a step and the light cuts her, she makes a cruel discovery, she cups herself in her arms as if by surrounding her body they could keep her from falling apart. she is blinded by the narrow band that cuts across the floor and the bed and the iridescent glass candlestick, that slants over to the mirror on top of the dresser from which it flashes painfully back into her eyes. she makes an effort to move and breaks free of this prison, she sees the bed again, the honey-colored wall, the bedside stand, she does not observe, she does not search, she simply opens her eyes, there's the glass of water, the porcelain lamp and the wax paper shade suffused with light, the painted flowers, their petals are drops of dried blood, when she absently rubs her fingers on them they turn into thick flyspecks that she tries to pry off with her nails, "how foolish i am, i always forget my glasses", she reaches out to the dresser but her hand falls short, a shadow trembling in the gloomy air. she sits down on the bed again, her arm is still raised,

suddenly she says,

"heil hitler",

adding:

"i'm a nazi, a fucking nazi",

her brother laughs

"just a dwarf that got away",

a thread of drool loops from one lip to the other, an inefficient trap: the only thing that dies in it is the light.

"close your mouth, sis, you look like a moron"

4

she goes back to the rumpled bed, "i was at it all night, rubbing myself, rubbing my twat, why do they call it that? i got wet, i'm still wet, praise God, nighttime isn't so bad, the sounds clamor for attention with their intrigues, their delinquencies and resentments, i'm so afraid of the sounds that fade away and come back later, cautiously, like the wasp's buzzing that emerges from the corners of a room, a high-speed drill probing the hallways of silence, the air is full of pores and veins, spongy air i have trouble breathing, corrupt air that eats away at me and my repeated silences, sometimes my brother stirs in bed in his room at the end of the hall and i hear the bedsprings, he must be jerking off facing the wall, his breath crushed against it, bouncing back in his face, his mouth, colder and less human, musty-smelling like an old man's breath, that's what he's got for company: a breathing wall, then the wasp goes back to weaving its lace, the bobbins moving at dizzying speed, the speed of this blind lace-maker, segmented insect, cold-blooded, only the wings disappear during flight or become a darker whirlwind in the almost total darkness within which they move, little tumors, nodes that construct disease. there's an outrageous itch on my neck, it burrows into my skin and stays there, a scratch or excrement, a telltale that takes so long to disappear i grow quite fond of it, after all it's my only companion, the sound of my brother jerking off also keeps me company but it is so far away within the night of sounds, without them the night would be dead, wrapped in black plastic, disgusting, it's the deadest thing i know, because a dead person still has something of a history prior to his death, it's there stuck to his skin like a piece of trash" (cough, The emptiness of a sound)

5

the child raises its hands to the statue, on tiptoe, the stiff stems of the irises wet his legs, the dew-heavy grass soaks his shoes, the fake leather more like cardboard: his mother says: 'they all cheat us' as she pulls on his socks, tenderly smooths them, snaps the elastic, gently rubs the welt that has yet to appear on her little boy's leg, a swollen, fat, shiny sausage covered with pink blotches of cracked skin that easily bleed,

Sara runs her fingers over the scaly skin, that eczema, and far away someone yells: 'mom': a woman's voice, phlegm catches in her throat, a fuzzy voice that can't pull free from the fibers of cartilage,

(this girl draws out her words as if she wants to wear them out,

one word never comes to an end,

it grows transparent, with a crude transparency,

this girl gets so tired she cannot stand to hear words, this girl, the words she says bury her like a shroud)

humidity buries her,

her face is shiny in the foggy morning, dilated by the shininess, the sweat, the film of stickiness manufactured by the night, subdued, her hand reaches for the mortally wounded goat, the arrow buried in its side, the bulging stone eyes are glazed over by the approaching end, the little life it has left holding it upright on its rear legs, though its diminishing strength is betrayed by their slight sagging, its hooves have been stuck to the pedestal for so long that lichen has sketched a black line in the furrow that marks the spot, the goat lives its petrified agony

the bow has been broken over Diana's outstretched arm, there is no vacuum left to encompass the violence of her intention, sparrows avoid her when they fly from the trees to the goat's horns where they do not stay long before dropping almost motionless onto the wrinkled back which they voraciously peck. the animal's head looks back, the shapeless stone grew in its eyes until it went blind, Sara walks

around it – what it would see, now, if it shed its carapace – and caresses the hunting goddess's feet that lichen has eaten away. a gritty shadow spreads between her toes, a crack rises from her heel the length of the leg, it widens at the thigh like a wound, a centipede feels its way along the edge of the gash like blackened blood then disappears into the open fissure, startled by the outstretched hand. a fleck of spit appears on Sara's lips, as thick as a scab, she hears the voice behind her leave her stranded:

"dwarf".

the word is a wasteland and she stands in the middle, the word strips away everything that protects her like one of those mirrors that push the landscape to the edges and only reflect the sky,

"dwarf".

she turns around even though she knows all she will see is the empty garden, the voice is hiding behind a tree or a honeysuckle bush or a tangle of thorns, a cowardly withdrawal to its hiding place far away. the child's mother is being silently pulled by a dog on a leash, she trips and falls forward, arms akimbo, the dog stops, turns around and watches her without moving, suddenly mother and dog are shadows in outline against the backdrop of the garden, the only ones in a landscape frozen by the morning,

the child leans against a pillar. The rough stone surface leaves an imprint on her hands, which she holds behind her back. Skin to be molded,

Sara waits for the voice to emerge from hiding and become a person scampering through the boxwood, bent over, or for a girl to slowly stand up in the myrtle, a mutilated corpse, and cry:

"dwarf"

Sara will be patient, always more patient than the voices that insult her, and she knows how to look at them until they stop, or make them retreat, staring open-eyed at the place where they drown,

(your eyes see nothing: they eat in silence, they are full of objects,

"don't look at her, don't look",

the kids say all together:

"hey you, you starved your husband to death and buried him in the kitchen)

("Sara, the dead will never forget you")

## 6

she is walking along the railroad track, the hedge is taller than she is. The rails sparkle intermittently between the stiff little leaves and the tangled branches. Every once in a while she runs her hand along the foliage and smells them, little birds live deep in the myrtle, they rustle anxiously, a nervous flutter of wings. The sloping platform emerges from this clipped green mass. A child runs up it, the effort slows it down. It is running in a dream. It doesn't wave to anyone. It shouts. Sara hears this cry coming from the landscape, a slowly unravelling line that she moves toward, enters into, then pulls away from. She turns around, and her lips follow its fading away, "oh no oh no what am i doing standing here next to the tracks where the trains come zooming past me, and the shock of the people who see me from the road, stopping to watch while the lineman or the nurse or the morgue attendant with his fedora in one hand and tweezers in the other walks along the tracks carefully picking up scraps of flesh, it takes concentration, this job, eagle-eyes, every now and again he stops and surveys the ties, rotating his head. he stoops over the tracks, extends his arm, for a few moments the tightly-held tweezers hover uncertainly over the gravel that has settled among the wooden ties and the weeds, then they move along a gnarled branch of myrtle and eagerly plunge, slowly emerging like a seagull with a tidbit in their mouth, a fishhead, gills, guts, and he smoothly spreads his overturned hat and into it drops the remains"

"get out of there, dwarf, get out of there"

the words have come from a car, they ripple over the passage of more cars, it is a lingering insult, debris that slowly disintegrates and disappears. Sara looks again at the tracks, the man walking slowly away from her, the hand in tenta-

tive flight against the afternoon sun, brightness that does away with detail, the pile of dirty clothes is fading away, the beige jacket for wrapping flesh and bones, the blood-splattered gravel, remains of the remains that the lineman collects as if he were out weeding, he searches here and there, in the weeds that mar the harmony of nature, on the bank of the river and the steamer sailing up it, a white outline on a fluctuating eternity, an aseptic lightness on the polluted water covered with iridescent oil slicks. the lineman stands up straight for a moment, on the point of stretching, gazing at the bloated and uninviting boat. it scatters the gulls that haven't gotten used to the white plastic that sucks light up insatiably instead of reflecting it, becoming a crude translucence, a glaucoma,

"what are you doing here, dwarf?"

there's the voice in the sudden absence of passing cars, in the garden fountain, the chapel festooned with statues stuck to it like remoras, the flock of pigeons, the olive trees, a few leaves falling dry and silver, a shimmering outline growing clearer,

(he forgot the dead man, the bits of him spread along the track, forgot the methodical collection of this death,

an old man has appeared out of nowhere and stopped next to the railroad tracks, looked left to where the tracks bend around a curve, turned back toward the river, has not seen the water but an indistinct brightness outlined by the

mountains of the Other Side, silhouetting them. he has lowered his gaze to the empty pool, the cracks in the cement on the bottom where the water has drained out, the parched scum over which dart the bluish reflections of flies, he could almost see their buzzing,

now he is walking along the edge of the dried-up pool, slowly, as if to hold time back, his back to the garden. The hands are pendulums lacking a body to grasp, objects that life has rendered useless

the useless hands that he cups together, all they have is each other. He looks at them. His eyes fill with the motion of this convulsive landscape. Then, alarmed, he searches. And in the distance, on the platform, he watches

*the hand raised over the stalled words.*

*The insults in the eyes.*

*The hand raised to the stalled eyes.*

*The blind voice raised above the mother*

*who hides her son's unspoken name.*

*Raised high, the hand buries its prayer in the*

*[body, right up to the hilt]*

From Abel's Diary

Translated by Ken Krabbenhoft

Excerpt from *A boca na cinza*

Lisbon: Relógio d'Água, 2003, 132 pp.

## Teresa Veiga

Teresa Veiga was born in Lisbon in 1945. She graduated in Law in 1968, and Romance Languages in 1980. She carried out the role of Keeper of the Civil Registry for eight years. Her first book for the publishing house Livros Cotovia, *O último amante* [The Last Lover], was published in 1990. Her writing has been praised by critics for its rigour, sobriety and distinctive style.

## COPYRIGHT

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## BY THE AUTHOR

Selected Works

*O último amante* [The Last lover] Lisbon: Cotovia, 1990 (novella)

*História da bela fria* [The story of the cold beauty] Lisbon: Cotovia, 1992

(short stories) – Portuguese Writers'

Association Camilo Castelo Branco Short Story Prize ; Pen Prize for Fiction

*A paz doméstica* [Domestic peace] Lisbon: Cotovia, 1999 (novel)

*As enganadas* [Women deceived] Lisbon: Cotovia, 2003 (short stories)

## Women deceived As enganadas

Teresa Veiga returns with a collection of short stories that contains one of the most precious objects of prose fiction within contemporary Portuguese literature: the first of the three stories, entitled *A Morte de um Jardineiro* [Death of a Gardener]. Not that the other two don't exhibit her mastery of the short story genre, written with such subtlety as to produce enormous narrative tension and density. But the first takes these qualities to an exemplary level of perfection. (...)

The characters and the events collide with a destiny that no one controls, and a truth that no one can hold back. What these three stories have in common, moreover, is that there is always a mystery to be revealed and a truth too profound to be searched out.

António Guerreiro,  
in *Expresso* 2003



The fifth book by Teresa Veiga, one of our best fiction writers, mixes psychology and social analysis, both tempered by a powerful and disturbing uneasiness.

Pedro Mexia  
in *Diário de Notícias* 2003

teresa veiga  
as enganadas

### Death of a gardener

The day when the civil governor hosted in the Government Palace the yearly party for his closest associates and the leading townspeople signified for his wife an affront that she bore with stoicism, never allowing anyone to suspect the enormous act of will required to keep up the carefree, radiant air called for by the event.

In addition to this celebration, a semi public event, the governor used the occasion of his birthday to receive in his country house those relatives he did not see throughout the rest of the year as well as friends and companions of his youth whom he wished to single out for special attention.

Except for these two occasions, when she was obliged to engage in social activity, the governor's wife led a secluded and fairly peaceful life, divided between her late parents-in-law's mansion which stood on a tree-lined avenue that until recently had been on the outskirts of the city, and the country estate, thirty kilometres away, which was part of the governor's inheritance.

The couple had two daughters, eleven and fourteen years old, who were day girls at the convent school run by Dominican nuns that for decades had held the monopoly of educating young girls

of good family all along the border zone between Idanha-a-Velha, Idanha-a-Nova, and Vilar Formoso.

The governor's wife was born on the other side of the frontier but had come to Portugal as a child, one of a group of fugitives that had managed to escape from the denunciations and persecutions of the civil war.

She was taken in by a family who were well-to-do but frugal in their habits, with no children and no adult younger than forty. Still, her adoptive parents' gentle, bland affection helped her resist the onset of grief, both while uncertainty about her family's fate lasted, and when it was learned that they had all perished in the cataclysm of the civil war.

When she finished her studies at the convent school, she was not disinclined to return home and become the full-time nurse of an elderly, ailing female relative for whom she cared almost single-handed until the day she died. At that time she was twenty-five years old. Although a naturally well-mannered person, she felt her debt was paid and began to think with some trepidation about her future.

She was still hesitating between a career in nursing or teaching, between the provincial gloom of an apartment in a lower-class neighbourhood and the desolate barrenness of fields sown with rocks that unexpectedly gave way to patches of cultivated land, when, at a christening party, she met a good looking man who couldn't take his eyes off her, and whose interest was reciprocated even before she found out he was the civil governor.

Rosalia Pérez wasn't especially attractive or gifted with the effortless charm and cheerfulness that certain women possess in abundance and win people over with ease. Also against her was the fact that she had never completely adapted to the reality of the people of that city and that environment. She always held back as if an element of shyness was forcing her to keep her distance, unless it was merely an unconscious desire to accept her fate as an exile.

The fact that Dr. Paulo Guerra, an experienced man and known womaniser, had fallen in love with her at first sight, made her wonder, with absolutely no irony, what obscure interest could have given rise to that feeling. An interest devoid of any monetary considerations, but interest neverthe-

less. It was enough to hear him holding forth on any and all of the topics of conversation acceptable in a family gathering to understand he would never take a decision that was not universally deemed to be intrinsically correct, served his purpose and did not contravene the codes of behaviour that prevailed in the community.

The marriage and the birth, nine months later, of their first daughter, astonished Rosalia more than she could ever have imagined.

Not given to bestowing confidences or speaking at great length, it was, however, easy to see that she exuded the supreme assurance of those people who feel themselves to be loved. Anyone who heard her, when the occasion demanded, briefly praise her husband's qualities, couldn't help thinking that she might surprise her listener with some shocking revelation, if only she dared. Dr. Paulo Guerra basked in his wife's approval for ten years, and might have done so for much longer if she had not read a book chosen at random in the municipal library, in which she saw her life reflected as if in a mirror.

On that very same day Rosalia found out that she was married not to a caring and considerate husband, but a selfish, domineering man who, without making obvious demands, had become the absolute master of her destiny.

The discovery of how she had been deceived, or let herself be deceived, for she had been brought up in the Christian tradition of espousing guilt, had no discernible impact on the couple's life.

Rosalia knew that she was incapable of confronting her husband, because of pride, cowardice, or because life had taught her to defend herself by putting on an act so convincing that she herself was barely aware of it. The most important thing was not to hate, or hate oneself, to be tolerant and to view all mistakes as the indelible mark of the human condition. In any case, she had never held herself in great esteem, and this protected her from understanding the irremediable nature of her profound unhappiness transmuted into nebulous resignation and vague grief.

The years passed and nothing seemed to disrupt the harmony of the couple, even though the governor had not entirely given up his womanising and she played a far more subdued



and secondary role in local society than might be expected of a woman who wished to further her husband's career.

On the day when the governor celebrated his fiftieth birthday nothing forewarned of the catastrophe that would destroy this illusory balance, bringing in its wake grave and unforeseeable consequences that went far beyond the tragedy itself, or bad luck, as others preferred to say, relegating the event to the litany of episodes that chart an individual's inauspicious fate, thus diluting misfortune into a feeling of fatality.

As usual, Rosalia awoke very early, at dawn on the terrible day, and from then on could not stop thinking about the hundred and one details pertaining to the party, some of which, strangely, had eluded her. It was always like that. Those sleepless hours tore open windows in her mind through which she saw everything in an unexpected light, although very often her thinking became cautious and dull once more as soon as day dawned.

That night, imagining the dining table set, as was customary, with the best china and glassware, it struck her that she always found it a little colourless, and she decided to risk something new, little dishes with flowers marking each individual place setting. She thought it improved the general look, but not enough. Then she had a sudden vision in which the table seemed to have been transformed into an altar lit by tall candles bursting from the corners like armfuls of flowers, the gold of the candlesticks and the golden tongues of flames projecting flickering patches on to the milky white of the damask tablecloth and sculpting the guests' faces in sections of light and shadow, as in a biblical tableau.

She was so delighted she thanked God for the inspiration, surprised that she had never before come up with such a simple, workable way to make the banqueting table more splendid. She merely had to go and fetch the candlesticks from the chest in which they were stored while the chapel was being restored. As for the candles, it was just a matter of seeing what she could find in the candlemaker's shop.

While she was waiting for daylight to come, Rosalia rethought her plans for the day, which included some essential shopping. Since she was already obliged to go to town, she decided there was no longer any excuse not to have her hair

done at the salon. Besides, she acknowledged, her husband was right when he accused her of not making enough of herself. By eight o'clock she was driving out of the estate at the steering wheel of the Morris he had given her so it could not be said he had condemned her to a life of solitude. She was a safe, disciplined driver who believed herself less skilled at driving than she really was. The governor had asked her when she was driving, always to imagine she was being judged by an invisible instructor seated beside her, and she had got used to carrying out all the manoeuvres as if they had been choreographed with rigorous precision, making her movements as smooth as possible. Instead of dealing with a machine it was as if she was seeking an understanding with a sentient being.

At the candlemaker's she found the candles she was looking for and was equally lucky at the hairdresser's where she was dealt with rapidly and, even more unusual, was not disappointed by the result. On her way back she took her eyes off the road several times to look at herself in the rear-view mirror, but even though she laughed at herself for giving way to an untimely burst of vanity, inwardly she was elated because the hair cut made her look younger, and couldn't stop thinking about the impression she was going to make.

As she neared the estate, an ambulance sped past in the opposite direction, its siren wailing. "God save us, don't let Him allow the poor soul in there to die", she said out loud, overcome by a great sorrow that made her ashamed of her morning spent in shopping and other meaningless pursuits.

As soon as she drove through the entrance to the estate, the feeling of impending disaster turned into panic when she saw the staff wandering aimlessly about the yard; only something very serious could divert them from their tasks. At that same moment her strength drained away, her vision blurred and her hands ceased to obey her in such a way it was miraculous that she was able to keep the car on the asphalt strip and didn't run anyone over when she burst suddenly into the yard, zigzagging forward until the engine stalled as the wheels buried themselves in the soft earth of a flowerbed.

"They're all right!" shouted the governor, and seeing the terror in his wife's eyes, he repeated, "The girls are all right, calm down".

When he saw that she was still unable to move, he called to the girls who drew near, and pushed them towards their mother so that she could see for herself that they were alive and in good health. Rosalia seemed to recover her strength, got out of the car with difficulty and stumbled forward, but instead of embracing her daughters, she turned to the governor and waited to hear what he was putting off telling her, dumbfounded at his wife's strange attitude, now she knew that what she held most dear had not been harmed.

"It was the gardener", the governor said at last. "The bulldozer overturned and he died at once".

When she heard this, she swayed as if she had received an electric shock and would have fallen to the ground if her husband had not held her up, drawing on all his strength to force her to remain upright. Dismissing the servants' offers of assistance, the governor took his semiconscious wife to the bedroom, and administered first aid, forcing her to inhale the contents of a bottle that provoked violent fits of sobbing and coughing. Coming to from the faint, Rosalia immediately remembered what had happened and, in a thready voice, more through gestures than words, asked her husband to tell her in what circumstances the accident had occurred and whether there was any possibility of the gardener surviving. Even after he had recounted the little he knew, since no one had been present when the fatal manoeuvre took place and the body was already lifeless when they pulled it from beneath the bulldozer, Rosalia kept on asking if there was no chance of their resuscitating him in the ambulance or at the hospital, and begged her husband, as a personal favour, to telephone immediately to find out about the injured man. The governor, thinking it best to quell any hopes despite his wife's obvious distress, insisted that he had died instantaneously, as had been certified by the ambulance men in whose judgement she should trust since she didn't trust his, and he advised her to accept the will of God and think instead of relieving the pain of the gardener's widow, who had not just lost her husband but the father of her three children.

"The poor girl", said the governor, "went in the ambulance clutching her husband's body. But in her case no one could say she over-reacted, since the death of the head of the family is a

genuine tragedy for humble families. Widowed at twenty-seven with three small children to bring up who will always want for their father's support and affection. The two oldest, seeing their father lying bloodied on the ground, tried desperately to help him up, and had to be dragged away and locked in the house so they wouldn't follow their mother into the ambulance".

Faced with this picture, Rosalia let her tears fall and, between sobs, insisted again that her husband should telephone the emergency department of the hospital, where he should by now have arrived, because they had to be quite sure that there was nothing more they could do.

The governor gave into her and returned with the news that they were going through the formalities of registering the admission right then and there was no information to give.

Rosalia brightened visibly, as if this news was a good sign and, although a Catholic who did not enjoy a close relationship with God, clutched the beads of a rosary and feverishly began to finger it, running one prayer into another at great speed, as if everything was in suspension and she could reverse the sequence of events. The governor told her that he was going to telephone the guests to cancel the invitations, waited a few seconds for a remark that didn't come, and withdrew discretely from the scene.

For two hours Rosalia did not leave her room, answering curtly that she was all right and did not want anything whenever one of the maids or her daughters enquired how she was. At last the governor obtained confirmation that the hospital doctor had signed the death certificate and the body was going to be autopsied. When she saw him enter the room with a mournful expression and close the door slowly behind him, Rosalia realised that there was no longer any shadow of a doubt, and, much to her husband's relief, did not have hysterics or take refuge in an accusatory silence. Instead, she seemed to emerge from the state of torpor into which she had fallen, as if the confirmation of the death was precisely the fact needed in order to begin to attain a new understanding of what had happened, and to draw up her strategy for survival.

Translated by Patrícia Odber de Baubeta

Excerpt from *As enganadas*

Lisbon: Livros Cotovia, 2003, 134 pp.



## Daniel Faria

Daniel Faria was born in 1971 and died in June of 1999, at the Monastery of Singeverga, where he was a novitiate. He lived 28 years "breathing like a flash of light". He took a degree in Theology and was awarded various prizes for his poems and short stories. *Dos Líquidos* [Of Liquids] was published posthumously.

### COPYRIGHT

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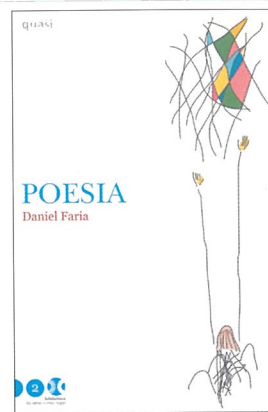
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## Poetry Poesia

Daniel Faria: *Of liquids*. The posthumous work of a young monk who has left us three of the most important books of Portuguese poetry of the twentieth century. A pilgrim in the silence and a nomad in the solitude of men, interpreter of the soul of the world and apostle of nature, Daniel Faria proves in *Of liquids* (as he had already done in the two books he published while still alive) that poetry has been and will continue to be the privileged stage on which everything pertaining to life and death is acted out metaphysically. (...)

Manuel Frias Martins



From *Men who are like places in the wrong place* and *Explanation of trees and of other animals* onwards (1998), Daniel Faria's poetic trajectory has been noteworthy for its coherence and consistency. Obviously we are not talking about scattered, unrelated groups of poems, but his books, in which one idea predominates and acts as a leitmotif, a secret corner that permanently surprises and dazzles us.

Combining mastery and formal perfection with an uncommon poetic sensibility, in his final work *Of liquids*, Daniel Faria reaches an astonishing maturity. Not only because of the richness of his style and imagery, because of his originality, but above all because of the rigour of his language, wrought in the tension between the intensity of the images and a stripping down to essentials. (...)

Maria João Cantinho



from *Explanation of Trees  
and of Other Animals*

I walk a little above the ground  
In that place where birds  
Are usually hit.  
A little above the birds  
In the place where they usually lean forward  
To take flight

I fear dead weight  
Because it is a scattered nest

I am slightly above what dies  
On that slope where the word is like bread  
A little in the palm of the hand that breaks it  
And like the silence that attends my writing I  
[do not separate

I walk lightly above what I say  
And I pour blood into my words  
I walk a little above the poem's transfusion

I walk humbly through the word's outskirts  
A passer-by one invisible step above earth  
In that place of trees with fruit and trees  
Engulfed by fire  
I'm a little inside what burns  
Slowly dwindling and feeling thirsty  
Because I walk above power to satiate whoever  
[lives  
And I squeeze my heart out for what descends  
[on me

And drinks

1  
If I turn on the light  
I won't die alone

2  
Even if the shepherds fall asleep  
The wayfarer's song will surely not  
Go astray



It happened that things got destroyed with no  
[surviving trace of him

And it was late.  
Alone didn't use to mean having no one near  
And what hurt him didn't have the cysts of a  
[disease

Just the placid space of things left behind.  
It happened that nothing was done without  
His heart.

It happened that he would spend all night  
[opening his eyes

So as not to be interrupted  
Stretching out his hand so as to be alive  
And knowing that not even he would get close  
[to himself

For he had diligently worked at being absent.  
Even if he walked very slowly  
Which was his only way of hoping to be  
[visited.

He who is now the man who never rested  
Who will never find the place of peace  
Unless there is equilibrium in vertigo  
A steady light in the midst of the whirlwind.

BY THE AUTHOR

*Explicação das árvores e outros animais*  
[Explanation of trees and of other  
animals] Vila Nova de Gaia: Fundação  
Manuel Leão, 1998

*Homens que são como lugares mal  
situados* [Men who are like places in the  
wrong place] Vila Nova de Gaia:  
Fundação Manuel Leão, 1998

*Dos líquidos* [Of liquids] Vila Nova de  
Gaia: Fundação Manuel Leão, 2000; 2nd  
ed. Quasi, 2003

*Poesia* [Poetry] Vila Nova de Famalicão:  
Quasi, 2003

TRANSLATIONS

in *Anthologie de la Jeune Poésie  
Portugaise*. Ed. Maison de la Poésie  
Rhône-Alpes, 2004





This project of dying is my vocation  
My waiting is a way of you arriving  
A way of loving you inside time

*from Men Who are Like Places  
in the Wrong Place*

I know that the man washed his hair as if it were long  
Because he had a woman on his mind  
I know that he washed it as if counting the strands

I know that he dried it with that woman's light  
With his very clear eyes fixed on the centre  
Of love, in the powerful transaction  
Of love

I know that he cut his hair to look for her  
I know that the woman gradually lost her cut-up clothes

It was a man visualized in the heart of the woman who  
His hair in her blood

In the running water

It was a man leaning like the fisherman on the banks  
And the woman sang so that the man could breathe



Men who are like places in the wrong place  
Men who are like plundered houses  
Like locations not on maps  
Like stones not on the ground  
Like orphaned children  
Men without a time zone  
Agitated men with no compass to rest on

Men who are like violated borders  
Like barricaded roads  
Men who are drawn to choked pathways  
Men spattered by all destinies  
Laid off from their lives

Men who are like the negation of strategies  
Like the hiding-places of smugglers  
Incarcerated men opening themselves with knives

Men who are like irreparable damages  
Men who are barely living survivors  
Men who are like places wrenched  
Out of place



There are many metres between an animal that flies  
And the stairs I'm descending to go sit on the ground  
But all I need is a square of peace and quiet  
To have absolute distance

---

The window I definitively lean out of is beyond what can  
[be seen

It's not an apparition  
Nor can it be reached without falling forward

Only where the landscape ends do I stand like a para-  
[chutist coming down

Suspended like the saints in a mystical rapture  
Risen like an angel on its wings  
And I feel lofty like a star. A cloud  
In the form of a man  
Levitating



SHUNEM (II Kings 4:8-37)

The absurd can visit you whenever it wishes  
You have a place for it. Each day a new entryway.  
You have memory and on the bench one afternoon  
The woman. "We're going to build a room on the terrace,"  
[she said.

"Four brick walls and a lamp in the middle,  
A chair, a table. The water jug  
Will stay with us and you'll drink here."

The absurd can visit you whenever you're in the field  
And your son says "Oh my head"  
Placing his hand on his nape, having dropped his scythe.  
The absurd can always stop at your door  
With your son on the grey donkey  
It can always visit you in the woman's face  
"It happened at midday, on my knees"  
And you will call. Each day you will open  
A new entryway whereby it can visit you  
And sit at your side. Where you usually grow old.

from *Of Liquids*

A free-falling bird even  
When equal in size to the stone  
That falls from the wall will never  
Attain the same colouring as the moss  
And all the less so in the month  
When its feathers change

To have some idea think  
Of how a man loses the age  
Of when he searched out nests

Keep in mind: man falls down. The bird  
Migrates so that the seasons won't change

It is by that rotation that the wall  
Can be circled without anyone building it. The circle  
Of that flight is the stone of age

To have some idea think  
Of swallowing it



I give you my absence and the night of the staircase  
You will descend to demolish the steps

I give you the step at my side no one wants  
My hand so that you can decide  
Which way I must face to die



2

A wound in the fence that's your breath opened up  
And you allow whoever goes by  
To pluck me

Even the wall is a shade that doesn't flower  
While they repeat to me the question

You planted me  
You let the frost survive

2

I love you in the heavy traffic  
With all the pollution in my blood.  
I lay bare my desire  
The place that breathes only in your mouth  
O word that I love like the speech  
Of my mother, of my friend, of the poem  
I have in mind.  
With my head full of ideas I visit the silence  
Of your lips.  
Mould me with the vault of your mouth  
For I suspect that I can hear you  
In the firmament.

2

I seek the path of a man who rests in you  
The way a man strays from his heart to journey onward  
The way he leaves everything and adds to his inheritance

I seek to know symbols, the milestones  
Of daytime, how to read  
Smoke signals and the flight patterns of pigeons - and all  
Things that reach us from the distance.

I seek to learn how to keep my feet within your  
Roads  
The way a man removes his shoes when he must cross  
Himself like a stream  
And I long for your word bursting once more  
With stars

So that I can cut them out and place them in the silence  
Alive  
In my mouth and in my hands  
On fire

2

Make your heart into the unloved thing  
The overflowing vessel you break with your mouth  
And sprinkle

your pulse in my blood

---



It hurts to see the magnolia fall. Believe me.  
The lightning comes  
Down on it. The storm.  
Plants are as fragile as the huts of men.  
We are both very fragile in this poem.  
With the lightning, the hut, the magnolia on our shoulders  
And no pulmonary ground firm enough  
For one of us to say after we've gazed into each other's eyes  
"Let's plant it here - *here*  
It's my pulse, my mouth  
It's the retina with which you search, it's the wood of the  
[door  
By which you shut yourself in the house. I promise you  
I'll never close my eyes  
My hands."

Translated by Richard Zenith

All poems found in *Poesia*

Vila Nova de Famalicão: Quasi Edições, 2003, 448 pp.



António Pedro Ferreira

## Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen

Born in Oporto, in 1919, she studied Classical Philology at the University of Lisbon. Her activities were divided between poetry and civic intervention against the Salazar dictatorship. Author of an important body of children's literature, her *A Fada Oriana* [The Fairy Oriana], *O Rapaz de Bronze* [The Bronze Boy] and *A Menina do Mar* [The Girl from the Sea] are Portuguese classics in the genre. Her poetic work, imbued with a passion for Greek culture, is profoundly human and Mediterranean in tone. It stands out, like her own life, as a voice of freedom. Sophia died in Lisbon in July of 2004.

### COPYRIGHT

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## *The name of things* *O nome das coisas*

Sophia de Mello Breyner was one of the great Portuguese poets of the 20th century. (...) Hers was not a poetry of intellectual sweat but of keen attention and concentration. (...) The poet claimed that her most important literary influence was Homer, whose *Odyssey* she read as a twelve-year-old, in a French translation. As an adult she made frequent trips to Greece, whose landscape and mythology and Olympic gods feature prominently in her work, along with Portugal's seacoast and history and Catholic religiosity.

Sophia (she was rarely called by more than this single name) was a vehement critic of the Salazar regime, and she served in the government formed by the Socialists one year after the 1974 Revolution. Though she soon resigned from her official duties, she continued to speak out against injustice and on behalf of various social causes (...).

Richard Zenith in *The Times*, 26.07.2004

Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen  
O NOME DAS COISAS

CAMINHO



Some poets make poems the way a builder builds a home – verse by verse, brick by brick. For Sophia de Mello Breyner, the whole world was home, and poetry was just a matter of seeing and of being. The act of poetry and the act of living were, to her way of thinking, inseparable. She defined poetry as "an art of being" that "does not require my time and labour. It does not ask me to have a science or an aesthetics or a theory. Instead it demands the entirety of my being, a consciousness running deeper than my intellect."

Richard Zenith in *Poetry International Website*  
([www.poetryinternational.org](http://www.poetryinternational.org))



---

from *Poetry* (1944)

*Midday*

Midday. A corner of the deserted beach.  
The huge, deep, open sun on high  
Has chased all the gods from the sky.  
The harsh light falls like a punishment.  
There are no ghosts and no souls,  
And the vast, ancient, solitary sea  
Loudly claps its hands.



*Sea*

Of all the corners of the world  
I love with a stronger, deeper love  
That naked and enraptured beach  
Where with sea, wind and moon I was one.

from *Day of sea* (1947)

*When*

When my body decays and I am dead,  
The garden, sky and sea will endure,  
And the four seasons, then  
As now, will dance at my door.

Others will walk in the orchard  
Where in April I often went.  
Sunsets will linger over the ocean  
And others will love the things I loved.

There'll be the same sparkle and feasting,  
There'll be the same garden at my door.  
And the same golden hair of the forest,  
As if I had never died.

from *Coral* (1950)

*I Called You So I Could Be*

I called you so I could be the tower  
You once saw standing white by the sea.  
I called you to lose myself on your paths.  
I called you to dream what you had dreamed.  
I called you so as not to be me:  
I asked you to erase  
The tower I once was, my path, the dreams  
[I dreamed.]



*Sibyls*

Sibyls inside adamantine caves,  
Totally loveless and blind,  
Feeding emptiness like a sacred fire  
While shadow dissolves night and day  
Into the same light of bodiless horror.

Bring out here that monstrous dew  
Of interior nights, the sweat  
Of powers tied to themselves  
When words strike the walls  
In blind swoops of trapped birds  
And the horror of having wings  
Screeches like a clock in the void.



BY THE AUTHOR

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Poetry

*Poesia*. 1944; 2003

*Dia do mar*. 1947; 2003 [Day of sea]

*Coral*. 1950; 2003

*No tempo dividido*. 1954; 2003 [Divided in time]

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*Navegações*. 1983; 2004 [Navigations]

*Ilhas*. 1989; 2004 [Islands]

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*Mar*. 2001; 2002 [Sea]

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*O rapaz de bronze* [The bronze boy]  
Oporto: Figueirinhas, 1996

*A Fada Oriana* [The Fairy Oriana] Oporto:  
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*A floresta* [The forest] Oporto:  
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*Primeiro livro de poesia* [First book of  
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*Calouste Gulbenkian Grand Prize for  
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*Literary Life Prize*, the Portuguese  
Publishers' Association 1994

*Camões Prize* 1999

*Rosalía de Castro Prize*, the Galician  
Pen Club 2000

*Max Jacob Étranger Prize* 2001

*Queen Sofia Prize for Iberoamerican  
Poetry* 2003

## Assassination of Simonetta Vespucci

Men

In the sharp outlines of rooms

In the mortal angles of shadow and light.

See how the swords flash - suddenly -  
Without anyone having drawn them.

See how the gestures are cast  
In the precise geometries of fate.

See how the men become animals  
And how the animals become angels  
And one bursts and makes himself into a lily.

See the endlessly blank stare  
Of the watery eyes filled with grief  
Of a woman strangled in her own hair.

And the entire room lies abandoned,  
Full of horror and full of disorder  
With the doors left open,  
Open to the roads  
By which the men are taking flight  
In the sharp silence of vast expanses,  
In the mortal angles of shadow and light.

## from *New sea* (1958)

### Biography

I had friends who died friends who went away  
Others broke their face against time  
I hated what was easy  
I sought myself in the light the wind and waves

2

## Lusitania

Those who advance against the sea  
Driving into it like a whetted blade  
The black prow of their wooden boats  
Live off moonlight and a little bread

## from *Sixth book* (1962)

### We Will Rise

We will rise again beneath the walls of Knossos  
And in Delphi the centre of the world  
We will rise again in the harsh light of Crete

We will rise where words  
Are the names of things  
Where outlines are clear and vivid  
There in the sharp light of Crete

We will rise where stone the stars and time  
Are the kingdom of man  
We will rise to stare straight at the earth  
In the clean light of Crete

For it is good to clarify the heart of man  
And to lift the black exactness of the cross  
In the white light of Crete

2



### *The Hospital and the Beach*

And I walked through the hospital  
With its desolate dirty whiteness  
The colour that remains where there is no colour  
And where the light is ash

And I walked over beaches and fields  
Wrapping round my neck  
The ocean's blue and the horizon's purple  
I walked on the beach almost free as a god

I didn't ask for you at the stone my Lord  
I didn't remember you as I drank the wind  
The wind was wind and the stone stone  
And that completely satisfied me

And in the ocean morning's open spaces  
Almost free as a god I walked

And I lived every day as if I were blind

But in the hospital I saw the face  
That's not a high rock nor a forest of pines  
And I saw the light like ash on the wall  
And I saw absurd immeasurable pain

from *Geography (1967)*

### *Antinoüs*

Under the nocturnal weight of your hair  
Under the diurnal moon of your shoulder  
I sought the unbroken order of the world  
The unheard word

Time and again under fire or glass  
I sought in your face  
The revelation of gods I don't know

But you passed through me  
As we pass through shade



### *Discovery*

Green-muscled ocean  
Idol of many arms like an octopus  
Convulsive incorruptible chaos  
Ordered tumult  
Contorted dancer  
Surrounding the taut ships

We traversed row on row of horses  
Shaking their manes in the trade winds

The sea turned suddenly very young and very [old]

Revealing beaches  
And a people  
Of just-created men still the colour of clay  
Still naked still in awe



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Translated by Michel Chandeigne.  
Bordeaux: L'Escampette, 1996

*Malgré les Ruines et la Mort (Anthology)*.  
Translated by Joaquim Vital. Paris: La  
Différence, 2000

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### Danish

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### English

*Marine Rose*. translated by Ruth Fainlight. Black Swan Books, 1988 (now out of print)

*Log Book: selected poems*. Translated by Richard Zenith. Carcanet Press, 1997

## Dual / The name of things / Islands / Muse

### from *Dual* (1972)

#### *The Greeks*

To the gods we attributed a dazzling existence  
Of one substance with the sea the clouds trees  
In them the waves' glinting the foam's long  
The woods' secret and soft green the wheat's tall  
The river's meandering the mountain's solemn fire  
And the great dome of resonant weightless free air  
Emerged as self-aware consciousness  
With no loss of the first day's marriage-and

Anxious to have this experience for ourselves  
We humans repeated the ritual gestures that  
The initial whole presence of things -  
This made us attentive to all forms known by  
As well as to the darkness which lives within us  
And in which the ineffable shimmer travels

With stooping bodies and patient rough hands  
Serving successive generations of princes  
Still a bit coarse still a bit crude  
Cruel greedy and conniving

It took an enormous squandering of life  
For her to be  
That lonely exiled aimless perfection

### from *The name of things* (1977)

#### *Torso*

His twisting torso turned the bulldozer wheel  
At twilight in a twentieth-century September  
On the road from Patras to Athens

In the sunset his Hellenistic beauty struggled  
The bulging muscles of his straining arms  
Composed the tumult of light and shadow  
That bends the bodies of the already lost gods  
In the Pergamum friezes

Likewise in the sunset that I inhabit  
The gods have been defeated



### *Portrait of an Unknown Princess*

For her to have such a slender neck  
For her wrists to bend like flower stems  
For her eyes to be so clear and direct  
Her back so straight  
Her head so high  
With such a natural glow on her forehead  
It took successive generations of slaves



### *The King of Ithaca*

Our civilization is so out of kilter that  
Thought has separated itself from the hand  
Ulysses King of Ithaca carpentered his boat  
And also boasted of his ability  
To plough a straight furrow in the field

---

from *Islands* (1989)

*The Navigators*

Multiplicity makes us drunk  
Astonishment leads us on  
With daring and desire and calculated skill  
We've broken the limits -  
But the one God  
Keeps us from straying  
Which is why at each port we cover with gold  
The sombre insides of our churches

from *Muse* (1994)

*Waves*

Where, waves, are there horses  
More beautiful than you  
Where more gracefully curving necks  
Where such a long shaking mane  
Or wild panting on the wide sea  
Where such drunk love on vast sands

Translated by Richard Zenith



*Gloss on a Poem by Byron*

I'll go no more on random roads a-roving  
Late into the night  
Though the moon be still as bright  
Though the howling  
Voice that eats me alive  
Still insist on love

For the heart wears out the breast  
And the sword outwears its sheath  
Time gnaws the broken heart  
And the soul is all alone

Though still the night insists on love  
And the moonlight cuts like a naked sword  
And the day returns too soon  
I'll go no more in stealth and panic  
By the light of the moon



Daniel A. Sampaio

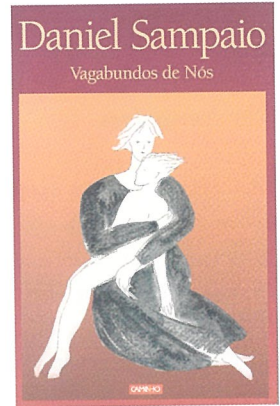
## Daniel Sampaio

Born in Lisbon in 1946, he graduated in Medicine in 1970. He specialized in Psychiatry in 1978 (Santa Maria University Hospital, Lisbon) and PhD. in Psychiatry at the Lisbon Faculty of Medicine in 1986, where he is currently Professor of Psychiatry. He was one of the introducers of Family Therapy in Portugal, and worked with Carl Whitaker (USA) and Maurizio Andolfi (Italy). He contributes for several newspapers and magazines, has co-authored two television programs and radio programs. In Portugal he is a best seller (some 400,000 copies of his principal books sold), and several of his books are recommended texts for secondary school and university courses on adolescents.

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## *So far from ourselves* *Vagabundos de nós*



Chapter after chapter, a mother (Luísa) and her son (Diogo) attempt to come to terms with the adolescent's developing sexual identity. Since childhood, Diogo has felt different and now, as an adolescent, he is trying to come to terms with his homosexual experiences. His mother gradually becomes aware of her son's sexual leanings but she doesn't know how to handle the matter.

Because of Luísa's difficult relationship with Diogo's father, she feels alone in dealing with the problem. In spite of several attempts on her part, it is only much later that her son opens up to her and confesses his homosexuality.

As Diogo was killed in a traffic accident at the age of 22, the book is written as a series of flashbacks, based on his mother's memories.

This is a book for parents and children who are confronted daily with the issue of being different.

Are you taking with you all the dreams I had when I invented you? I always wanted you to be the unspoken meaning behind my words, the echo of my voice in the distance, my constant "No" to the masters of the world. I wanted you to be serene and rebellious, creative but lucid, courageous and tender. I wanted you to be independent and close, child and man, someone who could carry my ideas with him into the future. Sometimes I envisaged you as a trace of me, a piece of my body living elsewhere, a new being only very rarely different from the one I had hoped for. At other times, I imagined you so far away I could barely make you out; then I would sit alone, waiting; time was sure to bring you back to my side.

I look now at the news of your death, at the newspaper cutting where someone (your father?) has ordered various meaningless words to be written; I can barely see the cross above the name Diogo, the name I chose with such joy twenty-two years ago, all I know is that I am filling up with coldness with each day that passes and that the horror of having lost you for ever is steadily growing inside me.

Today I can still hear the phone, the cautious voice of someone from the hospital interrupting a dream I cannot forget (we were by the sea,



you were talking about the latest film you'd seen, children were playing nearby, and at one point, you weren't twenty-two any more but four or five and I was leading you by the hand into the waves until the water reached as far as your knees, and you leaned your body against mine and said you were cold), I shouted to your father to wake up and we got there as quickly as we could, it was so late and yet the hospital was packed, ambulance lights, doors opening and closing, harassed doctors ignoring us, and, finally, your body lying inert at the far end of a room.

I sat next to your father on a wooden bench in the waiting room, and I waited in vain for some news, for some explanation, for someone to tell me that you weren't going to die, for some doctor to stop and listen to me.

I kept thinking about you. About the day we said goodbye to you at the school gates. About the story of the little boy and the rabbit, and the owl who showed them the way to the sea (sitting in the hospital waiting for the doctors, Diogo, I remembered the first time you corrected me, when I was feeling lazy and in a hurry to get to the end of the story; you had just turned three and wanted to hear every bit of it). The zoo we visited so many times; only I knew how much you loved the birds and hated the monkeys. Our walks in the pine forest, you running about looking for flowers, me sitting on an old tree trunk watching you, then, finally, the doctor

*he was in a deep coma when he was admitted, we're doing all we can...*

why didn't I drive the car that night, why did I ask you (demand, even) to go and fetch the bag of clothes we'd left at the beach house? I seemed to have forgotten that you'd had a bit to drink, as you always had when you argued with

your father, and - tired of listening to you two squabbling - I thought it would do you good to go for a spin on your own somewhere, to clear your head, and you agreed at once, always ready to do what I asked of you; how can I possibly live now with this pain?

You were in intensive care for five days. I didn't feel tired or hungry. I remember drinking tea in the rather run-down hospital café, where some of your university friends tried to cheer me up. They weren't allowed in to see you and so stood about in straggly groups between the entrance to the Intensive Care Unit and the door of the café, holding whispered conversations, your father always asking 'Who's that?' or 'What's *his* name?', your brother hanging back, not knowing what to say

*brain death, I'm afraid*

that was how the doctor told me you had died. For reasons I couldn't understand, we had to wait a while longer and only then could I be by your side for the last time, only then could I kiss you and say goodbye, not realising that I would never be parted from you, not even after your death...

Now you're sitting on my lap on the veranda of our house at the beach, your toy car is by the door, the white and grey blur of our cat appears now and then amongst the trees; in a soft, conspiratorial voice, you've just asked for your favourite dolly, the one you like to suck, you are barely three years old, and I'm already imagining your future, what you'll be like as a father and I as a grandmother; there is only one shadow in my life, your father's apparent lack of interest in you; but, fortunately, you make me forget all that by leaning back and almost drifting off to sleep.

Now I am at your funeral again, the voice of the priest murmurs something about you being

## BY THE AUTHOR

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*Vagabundos de nós* [So far from ourselves] Lisbon: Caminho, 2003

such a beautiful flower that the Creator decided to carry you off to the Garden of Eden, no one will understand how I miss you and how angry I feel at having lost you, suddenly it's five in the afternoon and I'm rushing to pick you up from the nursery, you come running over to me, beaming, the assistant barely has time to hand you your coat, once in the car, you hug me, and we're home in an instant...

I don't know how my life goes on, now that I live so far from you. Whenever we were apart, I could always instantly reinvent you by my side, I would even talk to you in your absence, and when you came back, I soon forgot the sadness of your leaving. Then, when you left again, it would all start over, I would go into your room and sit at your desk, I would run my fingers over the computer, the spines of books, your favourite toys, the miniature bottles you collected. When I began to get really worried, I would look for signs, clues, small details to soothe me, I even went through your papers and your drawers, and immediately felt guilty, and told myself that everything would be all right in the end and that you weren't really different from your colleagues, that I was worrying myself over nothing.

Like that long weekend you wanted to spend in Oporto. You were eleven years old, your body was growing, but your voice still gave you away, you were still the delicate, sensitive little boy I had learned to love as a baby. You spent a lot of time alone, and when I went to pick you up from school, you would be sitting reading, leaning against a tree in the old playground, or talking quietly with some girls, near the Staff Room. You never emerged sweating and red-faced as your classmates did after football, you never ran around in noisy groups, pushing and shoving on the stairs or on the sports field. I was worried by your general silence, your way of gazing off into the distance, the charcoal sketches I found in your notebooks, a taste for classical music that seemed more appropriate in an adult. That's why I found it so strange: your sudden desire to go to Oporto, this holiday friend called Pedro whom I had never heard you mention before, your unnatural haste to obtain our consent.

And why should we say no? A June holiday, the weather was wonderful, Pedro's mother seemed very nice on the phone, and your father was delighted that you should be so enterprising. And yet, the disquiet that had assailed me ever since your childhood resurfaced. I remembered your father furiously hitting you and me not knowing what to do. I invented excuses - we didn't know the family, it was a long way away, we'd arranged to have supper at your grandmother's house - but you would have none of it. It was as if the world would end if you didn't go.

I insisted that we should take you. The three of us went in the car, and you were so happy, you didn't even want to stop along the way, all you talked about was how good it would be to spend time with Pedro and play games on his computer. Your father seemed happy too, patting my leg and giving me a knowing smile as we listened to your enthusiastic chatter; he even drove more carefully than usual.

They lived in an apartment near Boavista: a sitting room crowded with shabby furniture, a lot of doors that opened onto untidy rooms, the hallway full of old bills piled up on a heavy desk. I wanted to go back to Lisbon and our discreet, tidy house, to the veranda where we used to stand holding hands and looking up at the stars, even to those moments when you went off to school and left me alone. Your father seemed different, he immediately started discussing the Oporto team with Pedro's father, he brushed any problems aside - of course, you could come back on the train alone, no, you weren't a fussy eater and, besides, people ate so well in the north. He seemed eager to get rid of you, and caught me completely off guard by enquiring if there were any restaurants nearby where we could have lunch.

I felt ridiculous with all my little anxieties: which room would you be staying in, did you have enough clothes with you, recommendations on what time you should go to bed and how many hours of TV you should be allowed to watch, what kind of things did Pedro enjoy doing that I didn't know about. Your friend looked at me slightly askance, there was even a hint of criticism in those myopic, bulging eyes, and he had soon dragged you off to the com-



puter in his bedroom and there you stayed, Pedro laughing loudly, you watching everything he did.

Pedro's parents insisted that we take a seat. I hesitated between a small green leather sofa and an office chair that stood beside a chaise longue, but to my surprise, your father pulled me down next to him and we sat facing Pedro's parents, who were solicitously plying us with drinks and nibbles. I could barely follow the conversation, and my gaze kept wandering back and forth between the gap-toothed candelabra and the view from the balcony onto some old buildings, as I tried to decipher your laughter in the distance: was Pedro really your friend?

Failed birthday parties, meetings arranged by teachers, but to which no one came, the head of year 6 saying that you seemed very isolated, your father suggesting that I was over-protective, and now there was Pedro's mother offering me a fish rissole. I asked if I could go to the bathroom, I needed to be alone to think. I walked past Pedro's room; you were both sitting on stools, side by side in front of the computer, and through the half-open window came the sound of cars in the street outside. The bathroom was next to your friend's room, I could still hear you as you chatted over your game, I saw my weary face in the mirror of a small cabinet crammed with tiny bars of soap and exhausted tubes of toothpaste. I wished it could all be a lie, the quarrels with your father and my fears; after all, you were just a boy like any other, and I was just a possessive, over-anxious mother. And yet...perhaps the problem had resolved itself, they say everything starts in childhood and that there's no smoke without fire, but what I could do about it then?

I went back into the sitting room; your father was animatedly discussing politics; Pedro's mother invited us to lunch, but I was quick off the mark and, smiling, said that I never turned down the chance to have an intimate lunch alone with my husband.

I remember that weekend in Oporto because I remember how, in the end, I did stop worrying; the fears that had started when you were a child seemed to have no foundation. I went to fetch you from the station; you were wearing a jacket you'd borrowed from Pedro and you ran to

embrace me as you always did. I thought how stupid I had been, everything had gone well and you were back with me, you even seemed more talkative, you chatted all evening about what you had got up to, the different food (you had, I recall, discovered a liking for rice) and your passion for computer games, you seemed not to have a care in the world. I thought perhaps our being apart had merely intensified my fears, now that you were behaving like any other ordinary boy, spending weekends away. After all, this was the onset of adolescence and, at that age, it was a good idea, wasn't it, to start learning to live apart from your parents? I reflected, too, on my own need to change, I couldn't go on, as I had until then, organising my life around you. And yet that was the way my life made sense. Work wasn't very exciting, your brother was going through a fairly trouble-free phase, and I didn't really enjoy the company of my women friends, who seemed to do nothing but gossip. And your father? Strange though it may seem, we were getting on pretty well. His life still revolved around the office, but he seemed more relaxed about you, and that made things easier between us. We weren't close, but we didn't have those awful rows that used to terrify you so. You and your happiness were my real reasons for living, and when I saw you free, like on that afternoon at the station, my eyes filled with an unmistakable light.

From that moment on, I promised myself that I would allow you to fly, that I would stifle my selfish desire to keep you by my side, I wouldn't suggest idiotic plans that you weren't interested in, I would keep my fears locked up inside me, well away from everyone, all I would ask was a special place in your heart; surely you wouldn't deny me that.

During that time, my fears only returned at night. I found your enthusiasm for Pedro absurd, I didn't like the constant phone calls full of words and expressions I couldn't understand, I imagined that, one day, you would go off to Oporto to live and I would be left alone, and I found my feelings of guilt over my lack of interest in your brother very hard to bear. At night, everything would immediately start up again, you were a little boy again, alone at primary school; I could hear your father criticising me for overprotecting you. You'll

remember my mother too; wherever you are, you certainly won't forget her. Your grandmother - Xinha, as you always called her - had been a wonderful companion to me, but, on that point, she was in agreement with your father. She often advised me to leave you alone, said that you needed to break free and take a few risks, the only way anyone learns to solve their own problems is by facing up to them, as she used to say with that serious air she adopted at 'moments of crisis'. Not even she seemed to understand me. She didn't see that I had sensed a problem from the start, she could not imagine that, in my view, the worst was yet to come, that one day we would be crushed by your doubts and fears and would face some very difficult times indeed. And it was my certainty about that worrying future which again obliged me to protect you, sometimes even to try and control you for no apparent reason, and, at the very least, to organise my free time around yours.

Pedro came and went, he was, after all, as you explained to me later, just a summer friend: 'You know how it is, Mum, the friends you make at the beach stay buried in the sand, but at least this friendship lasted until Christmas', you returned to your solitude and I to my life of details in which only you occupied an important place; your father and your grandmother Xinha started their sniping again. It was around this time that you came looking for me on the balcony of our Lisbon house. You knew how, sometimes, I liked to be alone, as I did on that spring night. I noticed how your wild gestures did not quite fit the words you were struggling to say. We talked about friendship and love, about how people at school talked a lot about sex and how you didn't feel comfortable. Your hands insisted on disobeying you; they were faster than your thoughts and seemed to lead them into forbidden territory which you only partly wanted to share with me. I thought all this while trying to help you, I punctuated your barely coherent words with encouraging noises, almost reformulating your sentences for you. I was left with the realisation that what I had feared was true, the childhood problem had not disappeared, you were still different, still alone, you were trying now to take things a step further, hoping to find in me

an ally for your inner self, someone who would not criticise you or make demands on you.

Ghosts pursued me as I listened, you had clearly already had experiences about which you did not dare to speak, perhaps the head of year who had been so concerned about your isolation had understood more than he said he did, a classmate would doubtless have been a better confidant than me, after all, what could I do but hold you close? You didn't pull away, but your body suddenly stiffened, your voice almost dwindled to a murmur against my chest and you told me not to worry, you were just off-loading a bit of adolescent angst, it was a difficult time, as I probably knew, besides, things would sort themselves out.

Sort themselves out, but how, my dear? Through eleven or twelve years of silence? By distancing yourself from your parents, as happens with so many other young people? And it was there, that evening on the balcony, that I felt sure our lives would always cross, that together we would fight ignorance and fear, and that, even on the very brink of madness, I would be there by your side; nothing would ever silence our love.

I said nothing of this to you, Diogo. I would never be able to share my mad fears with you, I would have been incapable of telling you then of my decision to remain by your side regardless of what happened in the uncertain future you had just revealed to me. I know now, though, that you understood everything: that I had understood what, before, you had only allowed me to glimpse, that you would never be able to hide yourself from me, that you had ceased to be the fragile, innocent child whom I had always protected without knowing why.

How I loved you that night! How I wished for those moments never to end! I felt as if I were sitting next to myself, as if I were observing from outside that mother and son and the secret pact being sealed between them, and the future time, without north or south, that stretched out ahead. You said nothing afterwards, your hand lingered a little in mine, and I didn't even notice when you returned to the living room without so much as a backward glance.

---

I am at your funeral again; some of the university friends I met at the hospital are leaning against the wall of the chapel; just near you, grandmother Xinha is sitting very erect; I wander, lost, amongst tight embraces and grave words, my eyes meet those of the person you loved and I immediately look away, I cannot allow anyone else to share

the pain we both feel at this moment, after all, we are not alone, because you are with us, and we will never leave you.

Translated by Margaret Jull Costa

Excerpt from *Vagabundos de nós*

Lisbon: Editorial Caminho, 2003, 175 pp.



Jorge Molder

## Maria Filomena Molder

Since 1980, she has lectured in Aesthetics, Philosophy of Language and Philosophical Anthropology in the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences of the New University of Lisbon. She began to write in 1984, for catalogues and other publications on art and artists, especially Portuguese artists, including Rui Chafes, Helena Almeida, Ana Vieira, Julião Sarmento, Rui Sanches, José Pedro Croft, Bernard Plossu, Juan Muñoz, Noronha da Costa, Antony Gormley.

Since 1978 she has published articles on problems of knowledge and language in philosophical and literary reviews, including *Filosofia e Epistemologia*, *Revista Ler*, *A Phala*, *Internationale Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, *Philosophica*, *Revista Belém*, *Rue Descartes*.

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## The imperfection of philosophy *A imperfeição da filosofia*



When one reflects on Maria Filomena Molder's essays – especially in a space as limited as this – one should not make the distinction between critical texts and creative texts. This essayist is not a mere translator, performer or interpreter who follows one path. Rather, she accepts the very uncertainty of knowledge, and treats words like unique beings in a brilliant language.

Maria Filomena Molder's writing has a creative energy rarely found in the Portuguese essay. To be read and read again.

Ana Marques Gastão  
in *Diário de Notícias* 07.01.2004



One of the most distinctive and disconcerting voices expressing Portuguese thought is, without a shadow of a doubt, that of Maria Filomena Molder. Her point of departure is philosophy, from which she comes to us with full professional status, as lecturer and researcher. But the particular authors with whom she is concerned, such as Goethe, Benjamin or Wittgenstein, are often unwelcome guests in the field of traditional philosophy, bordering on the heterodox. Or even on the frontier of literature – the case of Hermann Broch, for example.

On the other hand, Maria Filomena Molder frequently writes about contemporary visual arts, or even on literature, though she does not assume the mantle of critic, but of someone who can only work on philosophical concepts if she is also in a position to deal with "sensitive material". It is this constant slipping towards something else (...) that gives a disturbing singularity to Maria Filomena Molder's way of engaging and, at the same time, to her writing. The book that she has just published says all this just in the title: it is called *The imperfection of philosophy* (...). This imperfection is not a flaw, but an incompleteness that is poised between the search for what will make it whole, and the inevitable failure of that search. (...)

Eduardo Prado Coelho  
in *Público* 17.01.2004

*Would we listen to an oak or a rock  
if they were telling the truth?*

A Socratic challenge

This title is indebted to Plato, being drawn from a passage in *Phaedrus*, after Socrates has told the story of the invention of writing:

*Phaedrus* - Yes, Socrates, you can easily invent tales of Egypt, or of any other country.

*Socrates* - There was a tradition in the temple of Dodona that oaks first gave prophetic utterances. The men of old, unlike in their simplicity to young philosophy, deemed that if they heard the truth even from "oak or rock," it was enough for them; whereas you seem to consider not whether a thing is or is not true, but who the speaker is and from what country the tale comes. (275 b-d)

We might even add: whereas you seem to consider it important to know the edition, the city and the year, and to check the bibliography, the footnotes and the CD-ROMs on the subject.

This is a disturbing passage, together with others that do, in fact, follow it: one in which Socrates praises the fruitfulness of the dialectic method and the discourses graven in the soul, the progenitors of a race of men who were baptised with a still uncertain name - philosophers; and another one in which he sends winged words to Isocrates the fair.

To see or to walk?

Before returning to rocks and oaks, I should like to talk about this fruitfulness, in which

there is an inherent pleasure that cannot be confused with any other. This pleasure must be of the kind that is peculiar to an activity, the purpose of which is internal and therefore has to do with an agreement, a concordance, a happy medium between what is being done and the end that is being pursued. What kind of activity is this?

There is a great difference between learning, making thin, being cured, building, walking, and seeing, judging, understanding, living, being happy. Aristotle establishes this difference in *Metaphysics* 1048b, 20-35, whilst he distinguishes between those activities that have a limit (in the case of walking, for example, this involves arriving at a certain place) and which, consequently, are not ends, but are subordinated to ends, i.e. they are not actions or, at least, they are not perfect actions, and those activities that are perfect actions, each time they are performed, always being taken to their end, such as seeing and living. According to Aristotle, it can be said that we are seeing and that we have seen, that we are happy and that we have been happy; it is not, however, acceptable to say that we are learning and that we have learnt, that we are being cured and that we have been cured, for in these processes there comes a time when their limit is reached and they cease, i.e. we do not continue to be cured once we have been cured, just as having learned we are no longer learning and having reached our destination we are no longer walking.

Philosophy, the study of which Plato speaks in *Phaedrus*, appears to us as a hybrid activity, since, in considering it to be the highest form of contemplation, we find that it is always in progress, always fulfilling its end, being an end, just as we live in order to live, we see in order to see, we know in order to know. And yet, there

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is something in this activity of philosophising that bears some affinity with walking, learning and being cured, in the sense that it is effectively more because of the indeterminate nature of the place that we are attempting to reach, more because of the impossibility of establishing a precise limit than because of the clear realisation of the activity as an end in itself, that we accept that philosophising is like living or being happy. And this can be seen in the name philosophy, love, a dedication and a concern for what is fair, for what is good and true, for wisdom, the end of philosophy, to Plato's eyes, seemingly never being reached: the philosopher is not wise, he is a couple of steps away from wisdom. And furthermore, wisdom is not an end to be attained that is unattainable, it is an activity inasmuch as it is a fully realised action and, if we are to believe Plato's words, it has already been realised.

#### The legitimate pleasure

Plato knows that all written discourse, whatever the subject-matter, "necessarily involves a great part of amusement." By warning against this pleasure, which cannot be avoided, and, comparing it with the supreme happiness experienced by the person who, instead of writing, sows indelible discourses in the soul, ones that are capable of defending themselves, Plato prepares the legitimacy of a form of written discourse that seeks to restore the life generated in the soul, with a view to getting to know the truth about all things said and written, showing the person who is writing, how unimportant what he writes is, trying hard to give assistance to the letters, which are easily subject to corruption and derision. This man, who warns against the act of writing and its dangers, is, however, subject from the outset to the contamination of that "part of amusement," which behoves him through writing, it being the case that, in this instance, such a situation behoves him through his writing words that seek to tell the truth. For such people, perhaps the word philosophy, or another of the same kind, is the best one. Faithfulness to the uncertain nature of this

name is part of the pleasure of continuing in this activity, which develops into a form of studying, caring, dedicating oneself to the truth.

But the less uncertain operations that afford, and to a certain extent accomplish, this dedication are also reasons for pleasure. Plato talks of defining, of systematically dividing until we find the indivisible, and we might add to this the pleasure of finding connections, discovering similarities, linked to these operations, the pleasure of forming arguments, contradicting, rejecting, accepting, in which it can be seen that there is some control of this pleasure, which is a way of our referring to the assistance that it is expected that the one who is writing will render to what he is writing, in the name of that which he is writing about. As a supplementary pleasure, one that intensifies the others, we should mention the pleasure of discovering and regulating the conditions for finding links, recognising similarities, arguing, reducing, concluding, a pleasure that in Plato derives from his applying the method of division to the nature of the soul.

#### The paradoxical pleasure

If, as Socrates says in *Cratylus*, "even the gods love jokes," we cannot say the same about the suffering of being alive, something that men know very well and which the gods don't even know what it is. The Greek gods are immortal (to a certain extent and a certain degree, since the gods are also drawn from appearance or else rejected from it), for they do not have to feed themselves, they do not have to kill in order to survive, although they do so. All the others, who are in life and wish to live, have to kill to keep themselves alive, and this is a reason for horror, nausea, contempt, in the eyes of the gods. And it is the fact that, in order to keep themselves alive, men have to kill, involving their having to feed themselves on dead flesh, which causes the horror that the gods feel in relation to men. Perhaps this part of horror or this source of horror, projected onto the discovery that man makes of his own life, contributes

towards the determination of the end that is peculiar to philosophy, or rather of the particularities that are peculiar to the activity of philosophy, to which pleasure, although decisive, cannot correspond entirely.

There is a part of philosophy or philosophising that cannot be reduced or compared to the pleasure of philosophy, a pleasure that can, in fact, be recognised in any school or philosophical system, a pleasure that, whatever its underlying point of view may be, has itself been stated and justified since Plato, although it was in this latter figure that it found its inaugural and unrepeatable, problematic expression. At the same time, by now stressing this problematic expression, even though this part is not reduced to pleasure, it paradoxically contributes towards it. This part relates to what I would call an experience of our not being able to rid ourselves of what belongs to us, or, to put it another way, not being able to cease obeying something evident, an evidence that keeps returning ceaselessly to us, such as the one that is peculiar to the qualified anxiety of being alive, by being alive in this or that way, in this manner, *so*, as Wittgenstein would say, when commenting on Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. To give an example, the evidence of being able to be born again or of having been born in the form of this or that animal. Or, to put it another way, being unable not to follow that which torments us, reminding us of an equally powerful example: at the beginning of Aristophanes' *The Knights*, one of the servants justifies his belief in the gods by saying that they have taken a grudge against him. This is an excellent reason for believing in the gods, and Kierkegaard was the first to recall it.

Pay one's debt to the day or gather up its ashes?

Choosing one animal or another in order to be reincarnated, being pursued by the gods, are instances of the experience of being wounded by oneself, which is the indispensable *pathos* of philosophising. This kind of evidence relates to that part of philosophy which does not coincide with the pleasure of philosophising, but which cer-

tainly, and in a paradoxical fashion, is linked to pleasure, and which can be expressed through the acknowledgement of the day's present rights. This is a Goethian theme, it is the theme of a poet, which frequently could not be taken up by philosophers, busy as they are in analysing their wound, and who end up not replying to the demands of the day, of which it is a warning. In Antiphon, the Sophist, we find an exact and disturbing expression of the dangers of such a non-response:

*There are some who do not live their present life, but prepare themselves with great effort, as if they had another life to live other than their present one: and, meanwhile, the neglected time vanishes. We cannot go back and replay life like a dice that we cast again.*

(Stobaeus, III, 16, 30)

This idea of not being able to replay life like a dice that we cast once more is certainly related to Joseph Beuys' idea that, whether we like it or not, we are always alive when we notice that fact, and it is the discovery of this discontinuity that we have to respond to, at the moment when we begin to take an interest, embarking on the study of that we call philosophy. This means that there are a multitude of mediations, planes, levels, degrees, measures of discontinuity, between being alive and perceiving that one is alive. A discrepancy that is best expressed by such different images as the colour that the world has, a fine sharp blade, the bottomless pit, the sound of the spheres, the toothless mouth, images that appear as motifs in the writings of philosophers, poets and mystics. We are always thematising this discrepancy, whenever we devote ourselves to that which is called philosophy. It is, effectively, a question of transforming the discrepancy - a kind of horsefly that torments us, just as it tormented Io - into a motif - whatever aspect it may have - an undying motif, in the sense that, as long as there are men who take heed of the fact that they are alive and busy themselves with this, this motif appears.

Now, attempting to approach the problem from yet another angle, we must take Antiphon's warning into

account, not because of the notice that he gives us of the dangers that threaten those who do not pay their debt to the day, but in order to lay stress on gathering up the ashes remaining from the burning of the day, which did not receive its payment.

So, what I wanted to talk about was that strange look of the man who recognises that he is alive, the strange look that is cast on life. There is a strangeness that comes to us when we notice the fact that we are alive, even though we apparently should not find it strange that we are alive, for as soon as we notice that we are alive, we discover that we have always been alive, forever, i.e. since we can ever remember. And this is why, contrary to appearances, we are effectively denied the possibility of eradicating the strangeness.

#### The mystery of Lazarus

The following text will allow us to return to the oaks and rocks, continuing on along the detour that the strange look has chosen:

*The strange look cast upon things, that look of a man who does not recognise, who is outside this world, a look that is sensed to be a frontier between being and not-being, belongs to the thinker. And it is also the look of an agoniser, the man who is losing knowledge. In which the thinker is an agoniser or a facultative Lazarus. Not so facultative as that.*

(Paul Valéry, "Anacleta", *Tel Quel* II)

According to Valéry, the agonising look of a thinker or the look of a Lazarus. Now, a Lazarus is not an agoniser. Here, Paul Valéry does something that is very common amongst great thinkers, consisting of suddenly introducing a comparison, based on a partially inexact similarity, with the aim of clarifying the evidence of his thesis. It is a trap, a small trap, laid by thinkers between the provisional fixations of concepts, in order to be able to determine them

more suitably. The concept in question is the concept of thinker in two of its fixations, that of the agoniser and that of Lazarus. Now, Lazarus is not an agoniser, Lazarus is the man who, having died, came back to life, a false agoniser. What Valéry's inexactness shows is that the look of the agoniser, the person who is experiencing the taste of the throes of death, can only be restored through that man, Lazarus, who was initiated into its ceremony, although he did not reach the end of the initiation, since Lazarus did not really die, in which case he could not have come back to life. Only someone who is still living can come back to life: that is the mystery of Lazarus, who having been pronounced dead by his friends and relatives, became an apparent agoniser, who has nothing to say about death, and a great deal to say about life.

If philosophy is a form of preparation for death and if the thinker is a supposed agoniser who, like Lazarus, was brought back to life by the hand of the Saviour, then, if this be so, the thinker cannot talk about death, he may only talk about life. And yet, can philosophers accept that someone saves them, that someone has saved them? Paul Valéry has an answer for this: by describing the thinker as a facultative Lazarus and applying to him the restriction that he is not as facultative as that, he is stressing the consequences that are implied by the strange look on life: being able or not to come back to life. That is the answer. The choice is no longer up to him.

#### The Socratic irony

Let us now return, through this text of Valéry's, to Socrates and the quotation of his speech from *Phaedrus*. It is ironic, which in relation to Socrates does not generally require any preliminary justification. However, this passage calls for a detailed analysis, since the irony is developed at various levels. First of all, it is ironic because of the false admiration that he shows for the remark of the young *Phaedrus*, such an intelligent young man that, out of critical reservation, he does not believe in Socrates' words that

invent so many stories, which even involve Egyptian gods and their celestial messengers. This form of irony is the most evident and the most common in Socrates, the essential ingredient of the maieutic method, the false admiration that, in this case, underlines the critical power of the young man impassioned by beautiful discourses, a young man who no longer believes in the propitiatory value of the drug taken by those who used to go to Dodona to try and get the gods to assuage their uneasiness. They took the drugs provided by the priests, slept for a night under the oaks that ringed the temple of Dodona consecrated to Zeus, and, on the following day, recounted the dreams that they had dreamt, and the priests interpreted them in the oracles. Now, this is what Phaedrus no longer believes in. And does Socrates himself believe it?

*"Listening to the language of an oak or a rock" is the adaptation of an adage (Hesiod, Theogony 35; Homer, Iliad, 22, 126; Odyssey, 19, 163). Its meaning is obscure: possible allusion to myths, according to which mankind descended from trees or rocks (See Hesiod, Theogony, ed. M. L. West, Oxford, 1967)"*

These words, written by Paul Vicaire, the translator of the Belles-Lettres edition (which we followed for our version), correspond to the annotation of the quotation from *Phaedrus* that we are analysing. As a commentary - "its meaning is obscure" - it is admirable, i.e. the mythical belief that mankind descended from oaks and rocks contains an obscure meaning for those who, in their very modern modesty, do not wish to take sides, since the experience of what Socrates describes is now corrupted. Given this obscurity, the scholar obscurely directs the reader's attention to mythical belief, for this indeed will provide some clarification, however incipient it may be, only that he does not know which one: "probable allusion to myths..."

We are faced with the supposition, on the part of an attentive, cultivated scholar, who knows the long tradition from which Plato originated, where he was trained, that there were some men who firmly believed that they

were born from rocks and oaks, instead of from a mother and a father, and, given that they had that ancient lineage, they were also prepared to listen to rocks and oaks speak. Exactly in this way, and all the worse for the anthropologists, I believe that no Greek thought, and exactly in this way nor did Socrates, who states here that, if oaks and rocks told the truth, the truth should be recognised.

So, how can one justify Socrates' criticism of today's young people, who are so cultivated, so critical, so demanding, because they prefer quotations from a safe and proven source, fully backed up, instead of listening to the truth, wherever it comes from? With this statement about oaks and rocks, Socrates means, first of all, that, in order to think, one has to think in one's own atmosphere, i.e. in the language that one speaks, within that which has been established in the language that one speaks, in order to thematise that one is alive in this way, thus, in this manner, and in Greece that was done on the basis of epic, lyrical, sentential, agonic poetry.

And it is in this particular regard that we see the power of the Socratic irony operating in all its splendour. Nor does Socrates believe in what was believed by those who, according to his eulogistic statement, would be prepared, unlike Phaedrus, to listen to oaks and rocks, if they told things the way they are. Nor does he believe, insofar as his evocation already implies an irrevocable distance, already far removed from ancient belief, looking at it with a benevolent and historical look, that there were those who did believe...

This being so, listening to the rocks and oaks is a figure of speech. Thanks to it, Socrates wishes to highlight the fact that each of us can only find the truth if it comes to us, and that our only obligation is to recognise it. Strictly speaking, Socrates' ironic evocation has its origin in the principle of obedience to the oracular voice, in the aim of following that which belongs to us, recognising its trail wherever it shows itself to us. The timbre of the voice is variable and there is no way of anticipating it.

An affinity of good omen (an excursion to serve as a conclusion)

Between 1930 and 1948, Wittgenstein wrote two series of annotations to a work that he had been wanting to read for some time, Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. These annotations (published for the first time under the title "Bemerkungen über Frazers Golden Bough" in the review *Synthese* XVII, 1967), which were referred to earlier, represent one of the most marvellous developments of the words of Socrates. The link that is to be found throughout these notes is a defence of magic, which Frazer's anthropological research, on the contrary, sought to dismiss, confirming his deserved discredit in a time that described itself as progressive. The classification of the thought of others, especially primitive thought, as magical, involves a condemnation and expresses a disdain, both revealing themselves to be masks that protect the incapacity to recognise the commonplaces of the intimate experience, in Wittgenstein's words, of living.

Magic is therefore considered to be a way of establishing that particular quality that is peculiar to the life of the human being, which reveals him to be a *ceremonial animal*, and which accompanies his life as a way of being perceived in it, and which leads him at sunrise to perform a ritual in praise of Aurora, and a rain dance just before the rainy season. As Wittgenstein observes in a most excellent manner, at the moment when the sun rises nobody pays homage to the night. The ritual confirms an experience, exorcises and puts to the test our fear about it, in this case, that the sun will never rise again, but, besides this, and mixing this all together, it introduces song, colour, prayer. Beseeching Aurora to make her way across the sky again is a spiritual

movement that finds a close relative in our expression "till tomorrow."

In Socrates' time, at the time of the birth of philosophy, whilst its name, and what corresponded to it, was still being established, Socrates lamented the fact that young people no longer believed that an oak or a rock could be listened to, if they were telling the truth, that they no longer knew the simplicity of the listening heart.

This is the division, the gap that cannot be closed, on which philosophy is based, its matrix. For, although Socrates evokes those who listened to the rustling of the oak leaves, he himself did not know how to do this (such a city lover was he!). And yet, although it seems that the young Phaedrus took a step further, a step towards the place where we see ourselves now, the place already removed from Socrates, the place of the man who evokes an experience that he cannot share except by talking about it, that place will still, still and forever, remain tied to Phaedrus' feet, the nostalgic place of a belief in the legibility of nature, of a nostalgia of the simplicity of the heart that is implied by this belief.

In Wittgenstein, such simplicity is, so to speak, a way of seeing that, by being extinguished, will make the universes of men between themselves strange and opaque: to consider it a laughing matter or an incomprehensible thing that a man should choose as his future animal a small-sized beast, or that a man should worship the forest of oaks, which is the only image of his childhood landscape, implies, in the first case, to distort the question about identity, and, in the second case, to refuse to have any ancestors.

Translated by John Elliott

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— Pois sim, mas tomemos...  
tir do simples para o complexo. Sabe-se que após a fecun-  
ção o destino dos machos é a morte. Ora, como fecun-  
ciar, pergunto eu...

As coisas em redor, o grande candeeiro de pene-  
mesinha holandesa, as cadeiras, o relógio esmaltado, ou  
de nogueira velha, a tenaz caída no tijolo do lar: um abar-  
sem remédio. As terras, a vivenda, a grande mercearia e  
pais ondulados, a melhor do concelho, mesmo em Co-  
não são aos pontapés (convicção do padre Abel), na-  
pertencia verdadeiramente. A riqueza amargou-lhe pel-  
meira vez, um travo doloroso de que tudo era passagei-  
empréstimo, para largar quando Deus achasse justo m-  
lhá-lo na pobreza extrema dum coval. Entendia vagame-  
padre:

— Não aplique aos bichos a medida dos homens.

— E S. Francisco?

Lá falar, falavam. Mas ele sabia que nenhum dos de-  
tava a ser varado pelo pavor. Vida e morte o que são? A-  
é perder as terras, a loja, o dinheiro, para sempre; e ap-  
cer, devorado pelos vermes; ali estava a explicação da si-  
pugnância por bichos miúdos, aranhas, minhocas, care-  
centopeias, larvas, essa infinidade pululante de peq-  
monstruosidades. Esmagou as mãos uma na outra, por  
morte existe, pode chamar à porta quando lhe apetecer, e  
ginou-se demoradamente no caixão aberto, ainda em  
ainda acompanhado do murmúrio humano que o velav-  
a nada atirado à garganta da cova com cal por cima e