



Sights
from the South

PORTUGUESE LITERATURE 6

© SIGHTS FROM THE SOUTH
Portuguese Literature 6

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TRANSLATION FUNDING

The DGLB supports the translation of works by Portuguese authors and African authors writing in Portuguese. The categories of works eligible are: fiction, poetry and essay.

The assessment is annual. The foreign publishers must submit the applications until the 31st of March each year.

For application forms and more information:

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INTRODUCTION

Portuguese literature is one of the highest expressions of our country's contemporary culture.

For this very reason, Portuguese writers attract readers all over the world.

The success of the DGLB's Program in Support of Translation is an indication of this popularity.

We have received requests for translations of a wide variety of contemporary works as well as classics, both poetry and fiction, from the four corners of the globe.

The sixth volume of *Sights from the South – Portuguese Literature* features authors who exemplify the exceptional quality of the most recent Portuguese writing.

Two generations of fiction writers are included, representing quite different currents of contemporary prose.

These include Manuel Alegre's fictionalized autobiography, A.M. Pires Cabral's fresh look at rural life from the perspective of our present era, and valter hugo mãe's stylistically experimental examination of social change. Because each of these prose writers is also a poet, they pay special attention to the creative possibilities of language, fashioning narrative voices and forms of story-telling in which the lyrical quality is abundantly apparent.

The three authors featured in the poetry section give ample evidence of contemporary Portuguese poetry's extraordinary value,

as befits a genre with ancient roots in our country.

Each follows a different path: for Luiza Neto Jorge, it is experimentation with poetic form and voice; for António Ramos Rosa, the consolidation of a philosophical vision of the world and worldly objects; for Luís Quintais, the shaping of a modern *écriture* that is dense with literary references but endowed with a pure discursive flow.

Finally, in the *Essay* section, we present Vítor Aguiar e Silva, one of the greatest Portuguese essayists of our time, a specialist in Camões and literary mannerism who is also celebrated for his illuminating essays on contemporary writers.

This great scholar's beautiful and elegant style belies the depths of his erudition, which provides a great wealth of information on Portuguese literature, its sources and its scope, tempered by the universal reach of his learning.

This edition of *Sights from the South – Portuguese Literature* therefore provides an important overview of Portugal's contribution to world literature.

In offering it to the reading public the DGLB and the Ministry of Culture express their hope that readers worldwide will be able to have continued access to these as well as other Portuguese writers, and through them entry to a rich and exciting literature.

PAULA MORÃO | Director of DGLB







Fiction



Manuel Alegre
A. M. Pires Cabral
valter hugo mãe



Manuel Alegre

(Águeda: 1936)

_ ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A poet and novelist, Manuel Alegre studied law at Coimbra University. He has been the Vice-President of the National Assembly since 1995. Beginning in his student days, Alegre was actively involved in the political struggle against the fascist regime. In 1962 he was drafted into the colonial war in Angola, where he was arrested by the political police. He spent ten years in exile in Algeria, returning to Portugal within days of the April 1974 Revolution. A leader in the Portuguese Socialist Party since 1974, he ran for the presidency of Portugal in 2005 as an independent.

Alegre was the first Portuguese to be named an honorary member of the Council of Europe. Among other honors, he has received the Grand Cross of the Order of Liberty (Portugal), the rank of Commander in the Order of Isabel the Catholic (Spain), and the Medal of Merit of the Council of Europe. A number of his poems have been set to music and performed by the most important singers of the resistance movement, as well as by Amália Rodrigues.

Eduardo Lourenço has said of his poetry that “it spontaneously suggests to the ears... the structure of a journey, or of a traveller or — even better — a pilgrim: the most archetypal of structures”.

His book *Senhora das Tempestades* [Our Lady of the Storms] sold 14,000 copies in a single month. The title poem has been called “one of the most beautiful odes in the Portuguese language”.

Rafael, the novel presented here, has already been translated in Germany and Spain.

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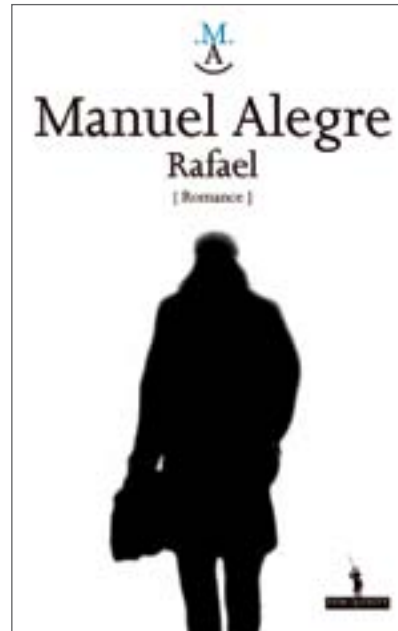
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Association, 1998



RAFAEL [RAFAEL]

by Manuel Alegre

Lisbon: Dom Quixote, 2004 (3rd ed)

260 pp.





excerpt from: RAFAEL

translated from the Portuguese by Kenneth Krabbenhoft

I lost my suitcase again. I'm in the white airport of a white city. I look for a cab, but all the cabs are gone. I have no idea where I am. I discover there aren't any buses left (or there aren't any yet). Maybe I'm dreaming. Maybe not. Maybe I'm awake in my dream. Exile, they call it, banishment. This is what it's like. A white airport in a white city. A need, and there's no one there.

I.

Later they will say there was going to be another attempt, that there was a brigade prepared to kidnap them in Madrid, it was by chance that it didn't happen, a mix up about the time and the place. But how can we know for sure, if it was this way or that – how could they determine that's what happened, especially after the scandal of the General's death? But maybe it could have been that way, anything could have happened later on, who knows? Maybe two hours earlier the brigade had been in the café across the street from the restaurant where Rafael, Jorge Fontes, and Manuel Maria were gathered. It was a long time after Angola and prison, a long time, too, after the day Leocádia, the housekeeper who did some work at the Police Chief's house, rushed in out of breath. "Run, child, run, they're going to arrest you again! The Police Chief's daughter told me to warn you!" Yes, it was a long time before that day when she passed me a note when no one could see, I didn't bother to read it, just stuck it in my pocket, my mother Isabel went to fetch the suitcase that was still plastered with stickers from the great hotels of Europe, she was nervous but determined, she knew there was probably nothing anybody could do but she didn't cry, she only broke down when my grandmother Filipa handed me fifty bills: "Take them," she said, "you're going to need them for sure, and I'll never see you again".

It was long after this leave-taking, they will say that one of the regime's top people was there, everything must have been carefully set up: the false deserter who had infiltrated Algeria, the meetings he arranged in Paris, this time there was even the knowledge and complicity of the Spanish secret police. Later on they will say many things, the truth will be distorted a thou-



sand times and reality turned into fiction. But on that day, at that moment, in that restaurant – the same one an ETA commando would blow up at a later date, in that place only Rafael, Jorge Fontes, and Manuel Maria are sitting when the two men assigned to the job arrive in Madrid from out of town, I can almost swear I know who they are, but if I were to identify them they would still accuse me of mixing fact and fiction, apples and pears, truth and make-believe, as if life itself weren't the same way, and what we write.

2.

It's hard to know what they'll say. What is told and what is lived are not the same thing. Nothing may be said about Pedro Lobo, who liked to ride motorcycles, wore a leather coat, wrote novels, used to pull a notebook out of his pocket and jot things down. Or framed camera angles with his fingers as if he were shooting a film of his private imaginings.

These things get on Rafael's nerves. Take notes? Why? You can't experience something and take notes about it at the same time. Or to paraphrase the famous saying: "It's better to live than to write about life". Make sure you write that one down, too.

And the other one does write it down. He's always writing things down. For example the time Rafael says: "We have a country that no longer exists and we belong to a country that hasn't come into existence".

Pedro Lobo smiles, takes out his notebook, writes.

Rafael is irritated.

– Screw your notes, he says.

They are walking up the Boulevard des Batignolles, cars pass them going the opposite direction. They're on their way to the house of a Gaullist coronel, formerly of the Resistance, he's teaching them how to work with explosives, he arranges passports for them, has a network to help Spaniards and is now giving a hand to the Portuguese. They call him by his first name, Julien, it might be an alias, he meets them in the living room, he's brought plastic explosives, there are timers and detonators on the table and the chairs. His grandchildren come and go from the room, sometimes one of them takes a detonator with him, he doesn't say anything, you can tell the family has been properly instructed.

It's late afternoon on that day they went to his house, the two of them going in one direction, crowds and cars going the opposite way.

– Somebody is going against the current here, Pedro Lobo says. The question is: is it us or them?

3.

But who knows what direction they're going, in the end, if it's this way or that?

(It's two p.m. on a day in February 1964. You're out of prison and yet you're not. Exiled inside yourself. A prison within a prison. Your war inside another war.)

Rafael is crossing the Praça da República, he looks behind him and sees: shadows.

(They follow you like vultures, they hover over you, sit next to your table in the café, eavesdrop on your conversations, telephone in the middle of the night.)

Shadows. Everywhere, all the time. Shadows.



4.

The invisible city inside the visible city. I look for it in the stones and in the shadows. Sometimes in the Tower, at certain times of the day it seems to glide on the river.¹ Sometimes at Santa Cruz, the one built of dark stones. I often pay my respects to Grandfather Afonso, occasionally wander through the cloisters, search for time compressed into an ogive, an angle, or a rose window, a little fragment of eternity, a patch of reflected light, a triangle, a zero, a symbol, a sign.² This is why I like the Monastery of Santa Clara, the underwater tombs, the baptismal fonts, floating leaves, roses from past eras, echoes, remnants, traces.³ Every once in a while I go to the Church of Santiago on the Praça Velha, it's the eve of battle, I am Álvaro Vaz de Almada kneeling at the side of the Infante D. Pedro, Duke of Coimbra, *Désir* is my device, the flags are waving, *Lealdade, Justiça, Vingança* (Loyalty, Justice, Revenge), I would rather people be ashamed of my death than that I should be ashamed of living.

Now I'm sitting on the steps of the Old Cathedral, on stone shaped by João de Ruão, I hear a disembodied guitar, the square is empty but I hear a guitar, a voice, voices. This serenade is for me and for nobody, D minor, A minor, or a fado in a major key. Then I go by the New Cathedral, I sit on the steps, my name is Eça, I say out loud: "This charmed and whimsical Coimbra". I see Antero, he's giving a speech, gesticulating, challenging God, he has yet to discover the new language of his sonnets.⁴

I know these street corners: some nights, after reading André Breton, they suddenly bend toward the sunset where Nadja is waiting for me.⁵ Looking out over the river I enter Duino Castle to read the Elegies,⁶ I walk through the garden with Rilke, he is talking about the death that each one of us carries inside us like a fruit, there are long arched galleries of solitude, and then I see: the tranquil waters of the Mondego, beneath the passing hours.

(...)

¹ A reference to the Tower of Coimbra University and the Mondego River – translator's note.

² The Monastery of Santa Cruz is located in Coimbra. D. Afonso Henriques, the first king of Portugal, is buried there – translator's note.

³ The lower level of the church of the Monastery of Santa Clara has been flooded by water from the nearby Mondego River – translator's note.

⁴ Eça de Queiroz and Antero de Quental, nineteenth-century Portuguese writers, a novelist and a poet, respectively – translator's note.

⁵ Breton, a French surrealist, published his novel *Nadja* in 1928 – translator's note.

⁶ The German poet Rainer Maria Rilke wrote the *Duino Elegies* (1922) while living in the castle of the same name – translator's note.





A. M. Pires Cabral

(Chacim: 1941)

_ ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Poet, dramaturge, novelist, essayist and translator, A.M. Pires Cabral graduated in Germanic Philology and Pedagogical Sciences from Coimbra University. He spent many years involved in education as a teacher, teacher-trainer and the head of a school. He has been cultural advisor to the Vila Real Town Hall in Trás-os-Montes, since 1978.

Author of a vast number of works, A.M. Pires Cabral has received the “Círculo de Leitores” Fiction Prize; and the D. Dinis Poetry Prize, awarded by the Casa de Mateus Foundation.

Seen primarily as a poet, *one of the most serene poets in the use of literary tradition*, faithful to a classical background whilst including aspects of a conscious modernity, Pires Cabral has also written articles on civic action, ethnography, local history and customs. He is currently collecting examples and researching into popular language for a major study.

Over the last two decades, fiction has become increasingly important in his work; and he has produced various novels and short story collections most of them taking place in rural settings.

O Cónego [The Canon], his fifth novel, is a detective story set against a religious rural background. Critically acclaimed, the novel is the story of “a priest who tells another priest, who then tells the readers, the story of yet another priest: father, gambler, hunter, remarkable or rogue or both, but certainly a man.”

Soon after its publication in Portugal, the rights to the novel were acquired by the Italian publisher, La Nuova Frontiera, where it will appear in early 2009.

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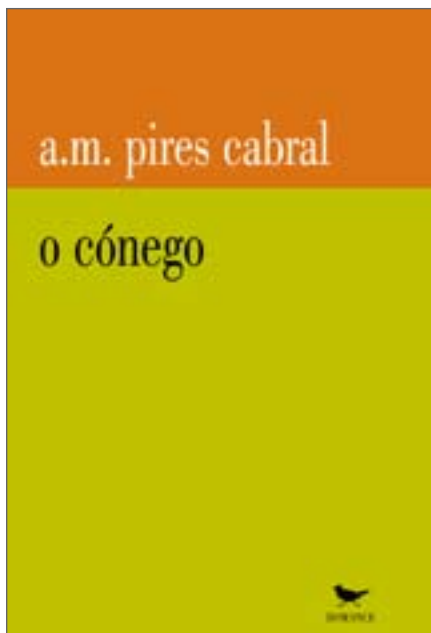




Excerpt from: *O CÓNEGO*, 2007

[The Canon]

translated from the Portuguese by Mick Greer



O CÓNEGO [THE CANON]

by A. M. Pires Cabral

Lisbon: Livros Cotovia, 2007

320 pp.

My name is Salviano Taveira. Salviano de Jesus Pinto Taveira, to be more precise, more complete. I'm twenty-six years old. I'm a priest.

Less than a year ago, I made my parents' dream – to have a priest as a son – come true. Probably something they had dreamt about since they got married, with the pious aim of contributing to the multiplication of the species determined by God on the sixth day of Creation, or even earlier. And it really took hold at the moment when, on 13th February 1923, around seven in the morning, the experienced old woman who was midwife to every child born in our village, picked me up and, after a quick check, said 'it's a boy'.

– May God choose him for His service – said my mother, still weeping with labour pains.

And my father, coming in just in time to hear this wish:

– Amen!

And if the check had had a different result and the midwife had said 'it's a girl', the dream would have simply gone through a slight twist imposed by the sex and become having a nun as a daughter. They had vowed that the first fruit of their union, if God saw fit to grant it, would be destined for His service. It ended up being me, and an only child to boot. As I've said, I made my parents' dream come true less than a year ago.

Why did they dream such a dream? In the great noble families, one of the male offspring, the second born, had almost inevitably to follow an ecclesiastical career. He would end up being a social ornament for his own family, that member of the Church. But my family was neither great, nor noble, nor thought about social ornaments. On the contrary, it was the most plebeian and humble any family could be. But plebeian and humble families also have such ambitions. Don't they say around here that flowers bloom and grow on dunghills? (May God pardon the comparison, which could be taken as immodesty, due to the part about me – the flower – and cruel, due to the part about my family – the dunghill. But it's only an expression.)

For my parents, having a priest as a son could, for instance, be an investment in the future: mine and theirs. (In the case of a nun as a daughter, the invest-



ment would be halved: it would only be her future that was guaranteed, as convent life doesn't bring in as much as a parish, however small it is.) In those hard times, nobody could begrudge them wanting to give their son an 'upright' life, as is sometimes said: a life with no place for the tiredness and uncertainties of hard work tormenting every passing day. The people say, somewhat malevolently, that 'no-one in the Church is left in the lurch', meaning that a priest will always get something out of his parish. It's a cruel saying, ignoring the truly pitiful condition of many priests up in those wretched villages lost among the mountains... But it's said. And my parents believed it too. Anything, basically, would be better than having to turn your hand to the soil.

However, it was not just the, let's say, materialist motivation that prompted their dream. That would have been far from the most important thing. They also had a great and genuine sense of giving, and of a crusade *ad majorem gloriam Dei* within them. Because, in spite of being poor and uneducated, my parents were people of great and deep-seated piety, scrupulous followers of each and every one of the commandments of God and the Holy Mother Church. It's probably worth mentioning here that, along with grinding labour on two strips of land, my father exercised the functions of a sacristan in our village; whilst my mother combined taking care of the altar of the miraculous Our Lady of the O with being a catechist.

Come what may, they had that dream and managed to convey it to me, through some obscure contagious mechanism, without the need to put pressure on me except very discretely; instilling in me, almost from the cradle, the consolations that holy religion reserved for those who served it with virtue. As time passed, the dream – which now was mine as well – blossomed naturally into a clear vocation. What's certain is that from when I was very young I had felt good, wonderfully good, inside the doors of our little village church, as if it were my natural place. Although today – at a time in my life when I've seen Santiago de Compostela Cathedral, during a final year seminary student trip, as well as the cathedrals of Salamanca, Zamora and Braga, and other equally grand churches – although today, as I was saying, I see our little village church in all its bare, almost moving, humility. When I was a child it seemed as grand as a royal palace. I would often leave my childish games to sneak off to the church. Its smells caressed my senses: the burning wax, the incense during divine office, even the musty sweetness of the old, damp altarpieces rotting away. My eyes were also exalted: I spent hours marvelling at the intricate carving on the altars, in which unknown 18th century imaginations had sculpted angels, some with only faces, wings and feet; others with whole bodies including pudenda, and huge-beaked birds greedily



eating bunches of grapes and managing, at the same time, to maintain a vigilant air. The altar of the souls, particularly, made a deep impression on me, with its symbolic force and depictions of half human, half-reptilian devils: not only as a memento homo, but also from an artistic or scenic point of view. And lastly, the ringing Latin of the religious services – whose prosody, for children of my age, was only useful for making fun of, hinting at weird correspondences in Portuguese that had nothing to do with the real translation – had immense resonance for me, suggestive but mysterious. *Stella maris*... What did *stella maris* mean? And *turris eburnea*? And *qui tollis peccata mundi*? I didn't know then; but the simple resonance of the words filled my soul with the certainty of what must be great and good things, pleasing to the Lord.

At four or five years old, I was a little angel in the simple processions on Saint Eustaquio's feast day, offering God, in atonement for my sins – and at that time, my sins went no further than some bit of venial naughtiness for which 'Jesus' would have been angry and told me off in a voice of thunder – the no small sacrifice of the weight of wings on my back, a wig as big as a lion's mane over my forehead dripping with sweat; and hard sandals, made for different feet from mine (generally smaller). A little later, I appeared in the ranks of the crusaders, proudly bearing a white sash with the scarlet cross of Christ over my heart. When I was ten I was allowed, every now and again, to assist Father Clemente at vespers during Mary's month.

The venerable bishop of the diocese, who once came to Covelas to conduct Confirmation, noticed my behaviour, such a contrast to the mountain ways of some of the other kids of my age; who were playing around and pulling faces behind the backs of their catechists, even on that solemn occasion. It seemed to me that his Most Reverend Excellency murmured something about me into Father Clemente's ear, and that something must have been praise because as he said it, my lord bishop never took his eyes off me, and all this made me blush with pleasure. And this was at roughly the same time that I, when asked by the teacher to write a composition about my plans for the future, declared that my deepest wish was to go to the Seminary. The teacher thought she should send for my mother and tell her of my inclination. It was the time to support or, if considered inappropriate, dismiss the idea. My mother held up her hands to heaven in a fervent gesture of gratitude. She had clearly chosen to support it: the long-held dream had taken another step towards realisation. The next day, my father went to find out how such things were done from Father Clemente. My schoolmates started calling me 'Priesty'.

To come to the point – because it isn't my own story I want to tell – I'll just say that I fulfilled the dream after attending the Minor Seminary at Vinhais and then the Major Seminary at Bragança with enthusiasm and profit – in keeping with my religious fervour. I left there tonsured and supplied with Dogmatic and Moral Theology, the Holy Scriptures, Ecclesiastical History, Canon Law and more than enough learning to equip me as priest in this tiny parish of Santa Maria Madalena de Vilarinho dos Castelhanos, where Lord Bishop Abílio Vaz das Neves, the venerable Bishop of Bragança and Miranda, benevolently gave me a flock to shepherd.



Lord Bishop Abílio, having heard the best reports of me from the rector himself and the wisest teachers of the Bragança Seminary – because truly (and may God forgive the vanity with which I say this) I always did everything I could to be the best student on the course; and I think I achieved it. Lord Bishop Abílio, as I said, called me into his presence on 16th March 1949 and instructed me, in his pleasant Mirandese accent, to present myself at Vilarinho dos Castelhanos. I received the incumbency with satisfaction - more than satisfaction, with tumultuous delight –, because it would mark the beginning of a useful life, in which I could guarantee a living, even if a parsimonious one, and perhaps help my parents, whose age now made working the land and taking care of the church arduous tasks.

However, there was also a touch of sadness in receiving it, as part of my dream was to exercise the duties of a priest in my home village – Covelas – hoping to fill my old parents with pride and joy. That part of the dream would have to wait for a while, but did not die in my heart. The Covelas parish priest, the reverend Father Clemente, was over eighty years old with all the accompanying ailments, and would not be able to continue in the parish for very much longer. It might then be possible for me to exert some influence over Lord Bishop Abílio, so that he would send me to my native land. I consoled myself, therefore, by seeing Vilarinho dos Castelhanos as a halfway stage, necessary to complete my maturing, so as one day to enter Covelas in the fullness of apostolic and casuistic proficiency.

Be that as it may, it was necessary to obey. At the end of my interview with my Lord Bishop Abílio, whose ring I kissed repeatedly, overcome by gratitude – a gesture which seemed to make the venerable prelate somewhat uncomfortable, but one which I could not repress –, I went back to Covelas to give my parents the good news. Their eyes, like mine, filled with tears. Of happiness, undoubtedly, first and foremost. But there was also some disappointment, because they had dreamed the same dream as me and also saw this part of it delayed, at an age when delays had begun to seem like definitive frustrations.

I spent two days equipping myself materially and spiritually for the change. I then mounted the family donkey, which took me to Macedo de Cavaleiros, crossing the Serra de Bornes, with my father accompanying me on foot, taciturn but determined; every now and again applying the disciplinary stick to the beast's flank, if it stopped to graze on some appetising grass on wayside.

In Macedo de Cavaleiros, I tearfully said goodbye to my father, who cried as much as I did, and took the train to Rossas. I won't mention how bathed in tears I left my sainted mother in Covelas. Although you, reader, must surely have already guessed: chiefly if the ups and downs of life have separated you from your mother for some time. In Rossas, there was another donkey waiting for me, this one lent by the reverend Father Albino Paiva, a holy man to whom I've been so much in debt since my time in the Seminary. Riding this donkey, I followed the beaten track to Vilarinho dos Castelhanos. (...)





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valter
hugo
mãe

(Saurimo, Angola: 1971)

_ ABOUT
THE AUTHOR

valter hugo mãe was born in Angola, grew up in Paços de Ferreira in the north of Portugal, and has lived in Vila do Conde since 1981. He has an undergraduate degree in law and a graduate degree in Modern and Contemporary Portuguese Literature. He has published seven books of poetry and three novels; edited anthologies of the poets Manoel de Barros, José Régio, and Adília Lopes, among others; and translated works from Italian and Spanish. He also dabbles in art: his first show, “the face of gregor samsa”, took place in Porto in 2006.

valter hugo mãe’s first literary efforts were in poetry. A collection of his complete poetic work will appear in 2008 with the title *folclore íntimo* [intimate folklore]. His first work of fiction, *nosso reino* [our kingdom], came out in 2004. The *Diário de Notícias*, a very important daily newspaper, called it the best Portuguese novel published that year. valter hugo mãe was awarded the José Saramago Prize in 2007.

o apocalipse dos trabalhadores [the workers’ apocalypse], the novel being presented here, is a portrait of our time centered on a group of ordinary people living ordinary lives in search of their personal paradise, afflicted by the hope of someday achieving happiness, or lacking hope altogether. It is the story of Maria da Graça, a cleaning woman in a provincial city, whose ambition is to die for love.

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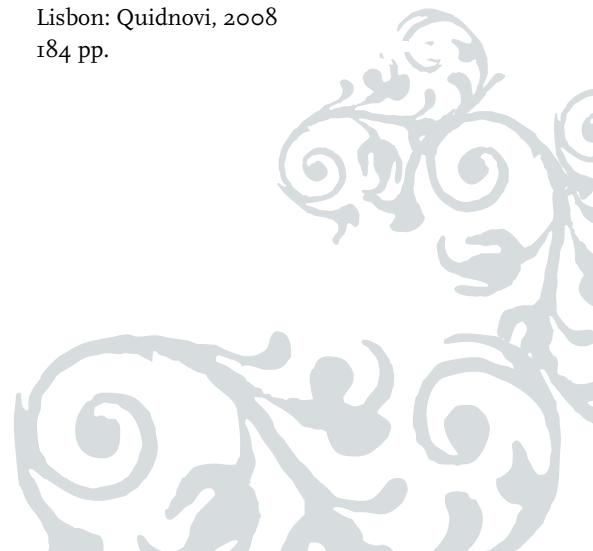
O APOCALIPSE DOS TRABALHADORES

[THE WORKERS' APOCALYPSE]

by valter hugo mãe

Lisbon: Quidnovi, 2008

184 pp.





excerpt from: O APOCALIPSE DOS TRABALHADORES

[the workers' apocalypse], 2008

translated from the Portuguese by Kenneth Krabbenhoft

at night maria da graça dreamed that souvenirs of life on earth were on sale outside the gates of heaven. people held their hands out, brazen voices called out to her as if they were hawking fresh fish, they closed in on her soul and, for a song, sold those things most likely to meet the pressing needs of the dying. the ultimate charlatans, she thought, actually ashamed that she had to go on thinking when she was dead, or maybe it was good, before entering heaven, to be given the chance to take an object with you, a materialized image, a kind of evidence of a past life or of extreme longing. she asked them to let her through, repeated that she was in a hurry. she couldn't figure out what she was supposed to do, couldn't make up her mind about anything. she was in a bind, she didn't want to risk setting herself up in eternity through an act of greed. in the understandable fear or anxiety or excitement of so obviously being there for the first time she kept hoping that st peter would explain how it worked so that, with one foot in and the other one still out, she could purchase mozart's requiem or a print of goya's frescos or within a budding grove, in french.

contrary to expectations, the gates of heaven were small. one had to crouch quite low to get through them, and those who wanted attention created a remarkable fuss that ended in violence and clouds of dusts that were kicked up with some frequency. maria da graça has barely escaped the hawkers; now she's trying to figure out which side of the square was the best route to the gates. it would not be easy to negotiate those hundred meters without getting knocked down, but it would be worse to be taken for one of the trouble makers and made to stay outside, eternally raging.

later she thought, they won't stay there forever, they'll have to move on to hell, pulled by the ears like misbehaved children. maybe there was a little closed cart that came by to pick them up like stray dogs. men would pick out whoever was blocking the way and throw huge nets over them, that would be the end of their fussing. then the square would be passable for a while.



maria da graça made her way, staying as close to the walls as she could, convinced that, because she had died in such a horrible way, she deserved every kind of pardon and would be allowed to enter heaven. this is how she introduced herself: i'm maria da graça, i was a cleaning woman, yes, i did houses – as if she only worked part time, a few days a week. st peter would ask her then, what's your point, and she would say, mr ferreira murdered me, he had been treating me badly already for some time, i actually foresaw what was going to happen. st peter leaned backward, thrust his head back and his belly forward, he laughed and said, my dear lady, that doesn't matter any more, the dead are all equal, they don't have jobs, and what they knew how to do is no good to them, or do you think there are rooms here that need cleaning. maria da graça repeated, but i didn't want to die, it was the old man, i was still a working woman, i'm not somebody who runs away, not from anything. the gatekeeper of heaven scrutinized her up close, stifling his guffaws, peering deep into the woman's eyes. and what might you have done to deserve it, he asked her, how can you expect to be forgiven if you stuck by that predator when you could have run away, what message were you sending. why was st peter provoking her, she wondered, why was he so nasty, he should know all about her iniquities. what a perverse man, to make it so hard to enter heaven, what a terrible impression it gave, the endless, noisy scuffles at the gate. the saint tightened his lips like someone withdrawing into himself so as to say no more, it was as if he were emulating a rock, a rock that instead of being a creation of beautiful, inert strength had rolled across the front of that little gate as if it were sealing a tomb. how awful it would be if the door to heaven was just like the door that opened onto death. going to heaven, thought maria da graça, is the same as dying. this idea shocked her, as if in the nature of things the one thing couldn't signify the other. she woke up in a sweat, her heart beating wildly in her chest, her mouth hissing in anguish: i'm not the kind of woman who runs away, i'm not the kind of woman who runs away.

that bastard ferreira, she mumbled. she had to be at his place in half an hour, had to ask the supervisor of the condo for permission to enter. then walk up five flights of stairs carrying the rugs she had washed the day before. the bastard had said to her, maria da graça it's better if you take the rugs home with you to wash. they have to hang in the sun to dry and as you can see there isn't much sun here. and she thought, as you can't see, because you can't see anything in here, i should have told him a thing or two about how badly he treats me, but she was silent, did not smile, answered, yes, mr ferreira, i can take them home. and maybe later she would throw open all the doors and he might notice how spacious his house was and how what he did with it was the opposite of what one would expect.

on the way over she was upset all over again by the erudite references that kept popping up in the dream and were running through her head. she was angry that she had put up with all those conversations which were meant to impress her and put her down. this is a book about goya's work, the man told her, a genius, as you can see. there's nothing like it any more, and not even god himself could have been aware of the marvel that entered the world with that man's



birth. you know there are men who take the creator by surprise, maria da graça, i'm sure of it. he swelled up as he settled into the old leather chair as if to say that he was brilliant for having come to this conclusion, as if he could surprise god himself and take pleasure in it. she answered, of course, mr ferreira. he stood up, put his hands on her shoulders, leaned over a little to be on her level, and kissed her. it's not that this is right, he said, surely it isn't right, but we both know our place and this is how society is structured, it's the awareness of this that keeps society from falling apart. you've brightened up this house, maria da graça, i've told you that before. he turned to her then and bent over and covered her mouth with his, probing her tongue as if he were feeling for insects in there. you shouldn't do this, mr ferreira, the same thing happened yesterday, she blurted out. it gives me nightmares. well i have the most beautiful dreams, he said. she settled herself in his arms and hoped that it would just be a few kisses, a longer hug to calm him down so they could each get back to their work. and what evil filth do you dream about, he asked her. it's grieves me, because one doesn't expect such things from a woman. he assumed that things had been set up differently for men. they have better jobs, greater freedom, even their conscience was different from women's. for women, loose morals were a luxury they couldn't afford. if anybody found out about it, maria da graça would have no more floors to scrub. mr ferreira smiled again and renewed his attack as if with fresh enthusiasm, it's so much more fun when one is aroused. don't play innocent, maria da graça, if anybody found out about this, if they knew how much we like each other, so to speak, they'd want you so badly they'd die to be able to touch you the way i do. maria da graça didn't know if what he said was true. it made her feel cheap that this bastard touched her when he bragged that he only did it because he could get away with it. every word she heard said the same thing, while one hand cleaned the house, the other one polished the boss's imperial ego. look, mr ferreira, one of these days my augusto's going to find out about this and show up here for a serious talk.

and later on goya had his ups and downs, you can see on the walls of god's house how he also bore witness to the terror that lurks in everyday events. he was a lucid man. he knew that art is incapable of exaggeration. art is incapable of exaggeration. do you understand what i'm saying, maria da graça, he would ask. she would give a little shrug but she didn't know what to say, it all seemed too precious to have anything to do with her simple life. she imagined she was only there to earn a living, and what she needed was to put food on the table and clothes on her back. those impassioned theories did not strike her as something you could eat. passion is the only thing that can energize a man that way, he continued, when it is aligned with god's will, only passion can result in such incredible work, this is what happened with fernando pessoa. maria da graça sat down timorously, looked at the book and saw the blurred faces of the human figures, their downcast, frightening expressions. she asked, and what did he paint besides these nasty pictures. the bastard opened his eyes wide, delighted by his student's presumed interest. he leafed through the book until he was able to say, this here, absolutely magnificent.



his kisses were ochre but also worn out and unpredictable, alternately greedy and unhurried. they came on all of a sudden and she didn't like them one bit. she would take her time cleaning the kitchen, tormented by his presence, because before or after she had finished her work he would touch her, some days more boldly, other days less. she spent more time scrubbing the dishes, looking to vent her suffering as if it was as evanescent as the soap bubbles. maria da graça wanted to deny the fact that she had fallen in love with him, but it was hard to focus on the idea. she kept thinking she hated him, but she was obsessed by this thought, like someone who can't think of anything else or, worse still, like someone who doesn't want to think of anything else. he was old, yes, much older, and he didn't care about being nice, cared even less about playing by the rules. she was married, as he was well aware, which made him nothing more than a man who abused his power, taking advantage of her lowly position of maid to thrust himself upon her and underscore her ignorance by recounting to her the wonders of the world. maria da graça knew perfectly well that he was a prideful and unscrupulous man, always ready to subject her to his whims and go far beyond what an employer should require of an employee. in order to survive the violence of the situation she focused on the money she made and how difficult her life had become. she could put up with difficulty unless it got seriously out of hand.

many times she had resolved not to go back to the bastard's house. to find someone else who wanted to hire her, because the arrangement of four days a week was not legally binding, and she was free to quit whenever she saw fit. mr ferreira, arrogant and self-confident, left her meager pay in a bowl by the front door. for him this was such a fortune that he could never believe she would walk out on him. he was careful counting the money so she wouldn't think he was paying her for some special attention or extra work and expect the same the following month. nothing doing. the bills were placed in the bowl after being counted and recounted, and there they remained, held in place by a bronze paper weight in the shape of a hand. when maria da graça picked it up she knew she would find the most penny-perfect of all the payments she received. if she flipped through the bills before putting them away it was only because she hoped the man would go mad some day, and this would be either very good for her or very bad. checking the money was a way of calculating the passage of time, another month completed prior to the big event of the madness which, she was convinced, would spell his death.

he stared at her as she went back and forth between the living room and the bedroom. she worked especially hard, lest the man lunge at her mouth or ask her to get up off her knees so he could run his hands over her body. she was as busy as possible with the chairs and the table, not giving him a chance to think she didn't have anything to do, that she had time for a carnal break. as the afternoon wore on she calmed down, at least today was the day she would take her money from under the bronze hand. meanwhile he thought he would like to see her leave his house so satiated that she couldn't stand her husband. the thought engrossed him. how many times had maria da



graça, who knew nothing of this aspiration, found herself in his bed, even on her way out, giving him the body and the time that she would later share with her husband. the bastard would groan and tell himself that age had done nothing to tarnish his performance. in the middle of it she would look into his eyes, wanting to tell him he had no idea what was going on, that she held no surprises either for him or, much less, for god, and that she would never have enough words to describe this love she hated. she would get out from underneath him arranging her clothes and he would smoke a cigar that scorched the air and stank to high heaven. she would excuse herself, explaining that her husband was in port and i have clothes to wash, i'm running late. he would answer with a smile and a query, when does he leave again, a fisherman in the heart of bragança, that's not an ordinary husband.

she would arrive at her house sweating the sweat of shame, she would take a quick bath so as to feel less guilty for loving another man. then she started cooking. augusto was soon home, he would claim everything on the table for himself, convinced that his fatigue was always greater and more deserving of respect than hers. after sixteen years of marriage, and his attitude getting worse, maria da graça regarded him as a piece of junk she couldn't get rid of. she would put the eggs on the table in front of him, the rice, the soup that was getting cold, and collapse into her chair, listening to him complain about how he had to wander around without anything to do. i went to the job sites, he said, they're crawling with men from the east, more and more of them, they're desperate, they'd carry the trucks on their shoulders if they had to, to survive. these men from the east are tough, he went on, they're going to be our ruin. because they're shrewder and stronger and more desperate. she ate the soup first, kept her left hand in her lap, pulling her skirt down, only once in a while placing her hand on her pubis – it hurt a little, it was a little conflicted, she wanted to lie down, she kept thinking about the bastard and how he came on her to her, pursuing her with desire.

augusto was rolling around on the couch, his stomach hurt, he didn't know that maria da graça had put a few drops of cleaning fluid or some other abrasive in his soup. all she did was turn the television down and go to bed. staring at the ceiling, she thought of unrelated things, she swore more and more fervently that she would spend some time with quitéria, that she would make her swear by all that was holy never to say anything to anybody. neighbors that they were, and a week would go by without them seeing each other. it was always like this when augusto was home. he would relax with a lukewarm beer and fall asleep in the living room, certain that living in bragança was what was destroying his health. the poor woman didn't want to kill him, she only wanted him to pay her back a little for her lack of freedom, because being married to him was like being on a leash attached to a wall, what was worse a stupid wall with faded paint, a wall made of stupid opinions. if augusto died in a few weeks from the cleaning fluid soup it would be a pleasant surprise though frightening, because she didn't picture herself a murderer. she got to



thinking about this murder business but she couldn't imagine herself under arrest, stuck in some prison or other. she considered herself to be a woman like any other, and because of that anything she did had to be reasonable, given the hard life that was hers to live. maybe those drops of cleaning fluid were her way of not running away from augusto. a way of leaving him intact while obliterating some part of him. making him half the man he could be, since maria da graça was already sick and tired of the half-man that he already was. she had crossed the line and there was no going back. quitéria gave her the idea, this is how you do it, you can give him up to a liter, a little bit every day, it seems to me that a man who drinks a liter of cleaning fluid will most certainly depart this life. they would laugh, accomplices in their unconscious criminal intent. it was a source of light entertainment drawn from the most enduring and difficult part of life. an entertainment to take the place of their silly adolescent dreams, those times when they had slept with a man out of love, discovering later that love always dies. the effort required to accept the insensitivity of men. abandonment or enforced solitude by decree of god's creative will. and later they believed that none of it mattered, that they might as well be made of stone. making their way through the world, observing it without feeling or even interest. and quitéria would say, shut up, graça, you're crazy about the bastard, your only plan is to go to ruin down there, meaning that everything in her life would be in jeopardy. indecisive, sometimes leaning left and sometimes right, swinging between endless duration and instant depletion, between sweet and sour, between being loved and being deeply hated. quitéria used to tell her, love that is born this way, for someone you hate, is the worse kind, it's like fighting against a shadow. maria da graça put another drop of cleaning fluid in augusto's soup and believed she was free of those disgusting feelings. she sought refuge in the clothes lines, shaking out sheets and hanging up even more rugs, until her body trembled, her nerves shaken by the horrible idea of falling in love with an old man who despised her, a man she had also learned deeply to despise.

augusto would still be sleeping in discomfort, squirming and muttering in his sleep, when maria da graça got up, quite early, never able to shake her nightmares, surrendering to the harshness of a sleepless night, in her everlasting innocence.

(...)







Poetry



Luiza Neto Jorge
António Ramos Rosa
Luís Quintais



Luiza Neto Jorge

(Lisbon: 1939-1989)

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_ ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND HER WORK

Luiza Neto Jorge was born in Lisbon and in that city died, shortly before her fiftieth birthday, but most of her poetry was written in Paris, where she lived from 1962 until 1970. She published two chapbooks, in 1960 and 1961, before going to France, and after returning to her hometown she wrote and published poems sporadically (including a few in French), but at that point most of her literary activity was centered on translation. The many, mostly French authors whose works she rendered into Portuguese include Stendhal, the Marquis de Sade, Verlaine, Michaux, Artaud and Yourcenar. She also adapted several texts for theater and wrote dialogues for cinema. Regarded as one of the outstanding poets to emerge in Portugal in the early 1960s, she is also the most difficult to apprehend. She was a poet in constant revolt, not only or openly against Salazar's so-called Estado Novo [New State], or the traditional norms of society, or the subordinate status of women, but against the very way thought and language typically happen and poetry is made. Her poems break the usual laws of reason and of reasonableness. The subject is often unstable, the narrative of what's happening tends to be fuzzy, there are unexpected shifts in register and point of view, and stanzas or entire poems may feel unresolved.

In Luiza Neto Jorge eroticism permeates the images and the very language of poetry. If the houses of her homonymously titled poem (see "Houses") are personifications of feminine sexuality, the poetic vocabulary of "The House of the World" is invaded by names of and allusions to body parts; a simple birthmark becomes a world replete with sexualized memories ("erotic cobwebs") and worlds within worlds (the hallway of the third stanza, or the oval mirror of the fifth). All these houses, like her poems in general, are open spaces, accommodating the world at large. Something of Surrealism's free and extravagant associations seems to characterize Jorge's poetry, which does not depend, however, on automatic or unconscious processes. It seems ultraconscious, hyperreal, but averse to the typical processes of poetic representation. Writing, for this poet, is not an ascension into the lyrical realm but a probe into what is closest to home: minimal things («Magnolia»), the body («Head in an Ambulance»), everyday sights and sounds («Waking up on the Street of the World»). (...)

RICHARD ZENITH

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POESIA [POETRY]

by Luiza Neto Jorge

Lisbon: Assírio & Alvim, 2001 (2nd ed)

320 pp.



from: O SEU A SEU TEMPO, 1966

[Each thing in its time]

The House of the World

Sometimes what seems
to be a birthmark on one's face
is the house of the world
is a mighty armoire
with bloody tissues stored there
and with its tribe of sensitive doors

It smells of erotic cobwebs. A delirious chest
on the scent-of-the-sea of sensuality.

A bracing sea. Roman walls. Any and all music.
The hallway recalls a rope stretched between
the Pyrenees, the windows between Greek faces.
Windows that smell of the air outside,
of the air's marriage to the ardent house.

I reached the door gleaming.
I interrupt the family objects, I throw open
the door.
I switch on the lights, switching everything around,
the new landscapes are lucid, light
is a clear painting, I remember more clearly:
a door, an armoire, that house.

A green, oval-shaped mirror
seems to be a tin bulging
with a shark writhing in its stomach,
its liver, its kidneys, its bloody tissues.

It's the house of the world:
it's here, it disappears.



Magnolia

Exaltation of the minimal
and the magnificent lightning
of the master event
restore to me my form
my splendor.

A tiny crib cradles me
where the word elides
into matter – into metaphor –
as needed, lightly, wherever
it echoes and slides.

Magnolia,
the sound that swells in it
when pronounced,
is an exalted fragrance
lost in the storm,

a magnificent minimal entity
shedding on me
its leaves of lightning.

The Poem Teaches the Art of Falling

The poem teaches the art of falling
on various kinds of ground
from losing the sudden earth under our feet
as when a love collapses
and we lose our wits, to confronting
the promontory where the earth drops away
and the teeming absence overwhelms

to touching down after
a slowly sensuous fall,
our face reaching the ground
in a subtle delicate curve
a bow to no one particular
or to us in particular a posthumous
homage.

Head in an Ambulance

There are cyclical wounds furious flights
inside rounded air sacs
wounds that are thought of at night
and break out in the morning

or that open up at night
and in the morning are thought of
along with the other thoughts
our organs are adept
at inventing like bandages

compresses helmets
sacraments
for securing the head
when it breaks away from us

when it's able to sense us
in a syncope or naked exposure
or in a more spacious error
or in a quieter letter
or in the torture chamber
in the dark chamber, of childhood.





from: TERRA IMÓVEL, 1964
[Unmovable Earth]

The Debt

Alive in the dagger's instantaneous lip
in the daily arrested hour

The debts grow they're already rough
they hurt the skin they're already pus

The day starts out from shadows
as a people starts from dust
Hour after hour light and death coincide

The debt spreads it spreads its wings
it seizes my weak dreams everything tempts it

Behind the gesture I make
my hand is alone my fingers conspire
asymmetrically
sticking out from my body until death

I'd give them away today if I could
But what weapon can separate them from me?

While I'm thinking
the debt keeps growing

Houses

I

The houses came at night
In the morning they're houses
At night they stretch their arms upward
and give off smoke all ready to depart

They close their eyes
they travel great distances
like clouds or ships

Houses flow at night
under the rivers' tides

They are far more docile
than children
Closed up inside their plaster
they ponder

They try to speak very clearly
in the silence
with their voice of slanting rooftiles

II

She vowed to be a virgin all her life
She lowered the blinds over her eyes
she fed on spiders
dampness
slanting rays of sunlight

When touched she wanted to flee
if a door was opened
she concealed her sex

She caved in under a summer spasm
all wet from a masculine sun

V

Crazy as the house on the corner was
she took in people at any time of day

She was falling all apart and
just think of it invited whores
rats storks nests train whistles
drunks and pianos
as well as all the voices of wild animals





from: A LUME, 1989
[Light]

Waking up on the Street of the World

early morning. footsteps of people going out
with a definite destination or indefinitely stumbling
the sound falling in my room and then
the light. no one knows what goes on
in this world. what day is today?
the bell solidly tolls the hour. the pigeons
smooth their feathers. the dust falls in my room.

a pipe burst open next to the sidewalk
a dead pigeon was swept away in the torrent
along with the pages of an old newspaper.
the slope rules
a car went under
double doors close
our yolk in the egg of sleep.

horns and sirens. it's still not clear
via satellite just what happened. the alarm
of the jewelry shop went haywire. hanging sheets
fan the buildings. pigeons peck

the glaze on the tiles. those who woke up have come
to the window. the alarm won't quit. the blood
seethes. the precious image via satellite didn't arrive the vcr
recorded nothing

and from a flower-pot on a balcony a drop of water
falls and lands on the bank teller's suit



Henry Moore's Women in the Gardens

The smell of rain has infected the gardens
Henry Moore's women inhale the air.

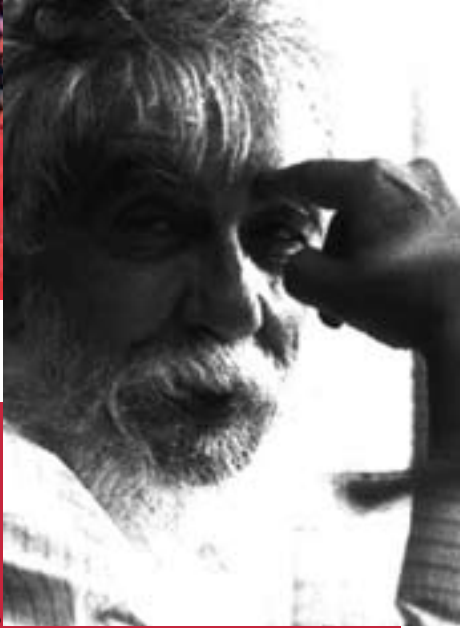
And you, son, take aim at me, camouflaged
in the cavernous whiteness of those beings.
"Dead!, you're dead!" you exult.

Among the magic projectiles adrift
— now chrysalises now arks in the flood —
they ask in their calm bodies for peace
with the earth, its furrows, its grass.

Are these our ships returning to the soil?



translated from the Portuguese by Richard Zenith



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António Ramos Rosa

(Faro: 1924)

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_ ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND HIS WORK

Born in Faro, the Algarve, in 1924, António Ramos Rosa moved to Lisbon in 1945, returning two years later to his hometown, where he was active in the recently created *Movimento de Unidade Democrática*, which opposed the Salazar regime. Arrested for his involvement in the group, he went back to the capital city to serve a three-month jail sentence. To make ends meet as a young man, both in the Algarve and in Lisbon (where he eventually settled for good, in 1962), he taught French and English and also became a notable translator, but from early on his great passion was poetry. He read it voraciously and became, as the years went by, an extremely prolific writer and critic of poetry.

In 1951 Ramos Rosa co-founded *Árvore* [Tree], which was one of the most significant literary magazines in Portugal during the post-war period, partly because of the attention it paid to international writing. For the magazine's inaugural issue Ramos Rosa wrote an essay on René Char, whose poetry also featured in its pages, and it was French poetry (the work of Paul Éluard in particular) that galvanized him to begin producing his own work. Ramos Rosa co-directed other magazines, where his own poems sometimes appeared, but it wasn't until 1958 that he published his first book, *O Grito Claro* [The Clear Shout]. A steady stream of books has followed, with over fifty titles to the author's credit. While the earliest poems (see, for instance, "I can't postpone love") reflect a political solidarity in opposition to the repressive regime, the poet's work soon shifted toward its definitive pursuit of origins – our original speech, our original space, our original bodies, our original ignorance. Adjectives like "initial" and "inaugural" occur rather often, in combination with nouns such as "voice", "breath", "light", "water", "stone", "tree".

Does the original innocence that the poet invokes (and in which he exalts) exist anywhere except in language itself? He would certainly like to believe so. He does not propose language for its own sake, in substitution of reality, but as a means for arriving at a purer, primordial reality. He explains: "What I seek, in fact, is a space in which to breathe. I want my words to sketch a silent, aerial, initial landscape. Something seems to prevent me from forcing anything, from being heavy, as if the living word could only emerge from an excess of lightness and transparency!" Lightness gives rise to living words, which in turn create more lightness....

Six of the poems presented here are from *O Livro da Ignorância* [The Book of Ignorance], published in 1988, the same year the poet won the Pessoa Prize, Portugal's most prestigious prize for contributions in the arts and sciences. He has garnered other major awards, both national and international, and his poetry has been widely translated, especially into French.

RICHARD ZENITH

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[THE BOOK OF IGNORANCE]

by António Ramos Rosa
Ponta Delgada (Azores): Signo, 1988
115 pp.





from: O LIVRO DA IGNORÂNCIA
[The book of ignorance]

A vocation that comes from want and from an excess
throbbing like a nest opening up to the outside
Ignorance relishes the dark substances
born into brightness from out of their own depths
They take their place in height and density
like a grove of trees in the breeze of a white science
And so all work is the startled shade
where the present center of a past age insists
This is being in the light of living things
and through a mineral blackness the liquid eyes
almost red or yellow trembling appear
Astonished by such soft motion
now we are no more than an ageless freshness
that gives us the height and shadow and perfect suggestion
of animals in the brush when the dawn of fresh peace



At times we grasp something
between shadow and shadow
And it's as if a nuptial gesture deep within
had unfurled like yet another shadow
this one upright And then our breathing
is a flowing in oblivion and in the quiet that calms
as if the other in us were the same that began
And without figures we come into contact
with the ardent emptiness
that wraps all contraries in a silent affirmation
and consummates within us the magic obscurity
in which to be is as not being and not being to be



I know of kisses more nocturnal than earth
Animals submerged among violent trees
rise shaking and oily to the tops of mouths
I know of the waving and electric flashing splendor
of ravenous mouths and blood risen from the depths
like a fire that flowers on foamy lips
I know of a strange softness and of a pensive ardor
that modulates the kiss in a lingering rapture
Who could express the fluid and fiery glory
of these liquid muscles emptying into estuaries of foam?
I know of kisses like bees of sun and like an agony
of a long glory I know the salty and bittersweet
substances clay sap wine
and the sandstone of armpits the black moon of the pubis
I know the thick and ardent flavor of unbroken being
that suddenly surrenders in the silent violence



Knowing no secrets having no visions
I enter an immediate and sinuous realm
I write in the shade of wood with an animal impulse
I brim with a unanimous light I am yours
May all that I write be the ignorant summit
of well-being May my arms and knees
tell of the tranquillity that roundly glows
May the clear atmosphere flicker and condense
into waves of slumber and the splendor of sentences
And may words have the murmur of groves
and of living waters and of still shadows
And may the fragrant breeze that frees and enralls
revive the bliss of being an illumined lover





from: NO CALCANHAR DO VENTO
[In the Wind's Heel]

Nothingness seems to be
its having opened
or gleamed
with the breeze in the blackness
And it is not a dome
or furrows
of night
But there is a vision
almost
like a tense stem
that barely gleams
and it is all a burst
that disseminates
inside itself
And thus with the shadow
it transmutes the shadow
and thus for us it breathes



To grasp with words the most nocturnal substance
is the same as to fill the desert
with the desert's very substance
We must go back and live in the shade
as long as the word does not exist
or as long as it is a well or a clot of time
or a pitcher turned in on its own thirst
Perhaps in opacity we will find the initial vertebra
enabling us to coincide with a movement of the universe
and to be the culmination of density
Only in this way will words be fruit of the shade
and no longer of mirrors or of towers of smoke
and like fiery antennae in the rifts of oblivion
they will initially be matter faithful to matter

Trees

What trees try to say
in their slow silence, their vague murmuring,
the sense they have, there where they are,
the reverence, the resonance, the transparency
and the bright and shadowy accents of an airy phrase.
And the shade and the leaves are the innocence of an idea
that between water and space turned itself to lithe integrity.
Beneath the magic breath of the light they are transparent boats.
I don't know if it's air or blood budding from their boughs.
I hear the finest foam of their green throats.
I am not, never will be, far from that pure water
and those ancient lamps of hidden isles.
What pure serenity of memory, what horizons
surrounding the silent well! It is a song in sleep
and the wind and light are the breath of a child
who upon a bough of a tree embraces the world.





from: VIAGEM ATRAVÉS DE UMA NEBULOSA
[Journey through a Nebula]

I can't put love off for another century
I can't
although the cry is strangled in my throat
although hatred bursts, crackles, burns
beneath grizzled mountains
and grizzled mountains

I can't put off this embrace
this two-edged sword
of love and hate

I can't put off
although the night weighs centuries on my back
and indecisive daybreak still delays
I can't put off my life for another century
nor my love
nor my cry of liberation

I can't keep putting off my heart



translated from the Portuguese by Richard Zenith

Syllables

Syllables.
The alcohol of December is cold and hoarse.
The cigarette bitter. It's a clinical cigarette.
Syllables.
Syllables are used to make verses.

The tabletop is smooth.
A spoon is a familiar and delicious
complex form.

A glass is as clear-cut
as an unobsequious servant.
A woman takes shape
in the eyes of the poet.
A body. Two syllables.
Just enough money. The coat collar
to cover his nape
and ears.
Syllables.



from: O NÃO E O SIM
[The no and the yes]

A God Asleep in a Garden

I saw his smile in the shadows of the leaves
and watched him go to sleep. I felt a plunging
into placid waters. A treasure
glittered among the stones and flowing weeds.
How tranquil that passion, all silence and light!
Like a large green boat, the foliage was under sail.
The heart of summer throbbing in the cicadas.
The smile of the god an infinite beginning.
In sleep desire opened out completely
in a corolla of water, fire, and air.
Symbols dissipated into instant certainty.
We were at reality's blazing heart.



Luís Quintais

(Angola: 1968)

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_ ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND HIS WORK

Born in Angola (1968), Luís Quintais moved with his family to Portugal after the Portuguese colonies in Africa gained their independence, in 1975. He did his university studies in Lisbon and is currently a professor of social anthropology at the University of Coimbra. His first book of poetry, *A Imprecisa Melancolia* [Indefinite Melancholy], won the Aula de Poesia de Barcelona Prize and was published in 1995. His sixth and most recent poetry title, *Duelo* [Duel] won the 2004 Portuguese P.E.N. Club Prize for Poetry and, in 2005, the Luís Miguel Nava Prize.

While other poets of his generation, dubious of poetry's traditional pretensions to tell truth and to create beauty, have retreated into a more modest program of self-expression coupled with intelligent commentary, Quintais is not afraid of addressing humanity (sometimes explicitly, in the form of "you", the reader) with a large voice. It is a questioning voice, by no means sure of having any answers, but it belongs to someone who evidently considers the pursuit of truth, and of poetry, worthwhile. In "A Certain Innocence", the action of poetry is ironically compared to birds flapping their wings in a bag of garbage, but it is nonetheless a useful action with redemptive, transformative power.

Certain poems examine the limited possibilities of language to mean ("The Dream of Language", "Flowers and Other Nameless Species"), but even while doing so, they are affirming their own power to say and mean. They take their place in the tradition of poetry, conceived as an art or science or discipline that is forever moving forward. But is poetry such as this, with its softly but undeniably declamatory tone, passé? Can poetry still transform what it touches and create, with words, a kind of truth or beauty? Luís Quintais seems to think so, and though his anthropological pursuits have made him (he says) a pessimist with regard to human nature, he apparently hopes that poetry can make some humans more humanitarian. Else why would he spend his ink defending animals against our butchery, in the chilling prose poem titled "For Animals"? A poem which, of course, is not only about animals.

RICHARD ZENITH

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by Luís Quintais
Lisbon: Livros Cotovia, 2004
110 pp.



from: DUELO, 2004
[Duel]

The Map and the Territory

Boredom was the space where we waged
the battle of our lives. The teacher
talked and we didn't listen
enthralled as we were
by the time contained in our graph paper,
by our guesses and our criss-crossing shots.

Today we know (from habit or evasion)
that the metaphor is this: a blind attempt
to hit the objects floating
on the grid, battleships
that will sink, if we're adept
at drawing and reading shapes.

Most of us, however, discover
the greater difference: the map is not reality.
Reality meanders over a vast territory
for which there is no metrics,
only a dream of metrics.
The heavy shadow covers the little truth
we manage to salvage and, moving,
destroys its legacy.

You know nothing because you remember nothing.



The Dream of Language

You'll write about the subjection of animals.
But not today. Remember how the panther
still moves in the literature-free cage

it inherited. You'll remember. But not today.
Because today's the day when metaphors
awaken, the chest opens up, and language

resembles an invention in progress.
A vigil of metaphors filling up the night,
as if it and its mantle and its symbols

were covered by an eternal Saint Elmo's fire.
Today's the day when night becomes day,
when language celebrates animals

after the animals have perished
but with no trace of them surviving
in memory or in longing. Just language,

just meaning and sound echoing inside
meaning, with no possibility of a beginning
asserting itself, no possibility of an end.

You too will have to wake up
to the vigil of metaphors,
to the dream of language.

Fear

Layer on layer on layer:
the submerged remnant of your life.
Now and then
some shift, some twist, some force
that you'll know by its effect, announces
the imminent collapse.

Give what's left of your future
to that house's reinforcement.
Give it your attention and your affliction.
Give it the intelligence of your fear.

The World as Representation

"The world is my representation."
What type of image
flashes in my mind
when, at night, a dog howls
as if its flesh
were not flesh of its flesh
but a thick veil
covering its pain
and making it sharper?

I fling open a window
and pursue the trail and the rage
of that extraordinary dog,
that dog that exists somewhere
past seeing.

The night I'd ignored becomes visible,
but not that rage, that dog's absolute rage,
even though my eyes go blind
from searching, with a desperate will,
for light.



For Animals

For animals eternal Treblinka

The memory I've been given is rife with martyrdom.
Mother took me by the hand. We had reached the sacrificial perimeter.
The sound of chickens facing the end. Their innocent clucking. The hushed violence of exposed carcasses. Guts, the stench of screaming guts. There were stands within the perimeter calling for truth and commerce. The plump, flayed meats lightly swayed, hanging from large metal hooks. Soaked feathers littered the ground. A decapitated chicken embraced the world. Narrow furrows inside the perimeter carried off the blood to a place I imagined to be far away, as far as a faraway country.
The guttural agony subsided. People were drawing their drapes for the peaceful midday meal.





From: ANGST, 2002

Flowers and Other Nameless Species

Nothing in nature has a name.
As if it were a botanical garden
with only the vaguest indications, preferably in Latin.

Linnaeus would laugh at my happy ignorance,
at this knowledge that blithely
delights in not knowing.

Colors, shapes, inebriating fragrances,
the senseless, sensation-filled vertigo of a forest,
the vegetable atmosphere of a greenhouse,

the flowers like open sex organs – are they
sex organs? – which I dive into as visitors look on.
They'd be shocked to find out that nothing in nature –

is “nature” this voluptuous game
of self-ignorance? – has a name. It's all organic essence
not found in herbariums, all disproportion,

all a dream of indecipherables slowly rotting
before this virtuous classificatory ignorance
bursting with life inside me.

translated from the Portuguese by Richard Zenith

A Certain Innocence

Birds devour the garbage.
Gluttony makes them scramble,
contriving ambushes, machinations

which the soul has no part in.
Their wings go flap flap flap
in the black plastic. You stop.

Something makes you observe.
With aphorisms you sanctify
the reasons of those who despair.

What does poetry do?
It redeems and redeems and redeems
like those wings thrashing

the black plastic, flap flap flap.
You sanctify the reasons
of those who despair,

the anguishing implications
of the imagination, the world
going out like the light

in the room of childhood,
thrashing the sumptuous plastic,
all that you turned your back on

and that doesn't demand to exist.
What does poetry do?
It redeems certain types of things

through a certain type of words a certain
type of wings flap flap flap a certain type
of desperate reasons.







Essay



Vitor Aguiar e Silva



Vítor Aguiar e Silva

(Penalva do Castelo: 1939)

_ ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Vítor Aguiar e Silva studied at Coimbra University, where he was later Full Professor at the Faculty of Letters until 1989. In 1990, he became Vice-Chancellor of Minho University, a position he held until his retirement in 2002. He has also been visiting professor at various universities abroad. Complementing his university career, he has held a number of governmental appointments within the fields of Education and Culture. Vítor Aguiar e Silva's work has focused on two main fields: Literary Theory and Mannerist (frequently returning to Camões, a constant academic passion), Baroque and Modern Portuguese Literature. In all these areas his work has received national and international recognition. He was awarded, in 1994, the Essay Prize by the Portuguese Association of Literary Critics and the Portuguese Writers Association for *Camões: labirintos e fascínios* [*Camões: labyrinths and fascinations*] and, in 2003, he received the Vergílio Ferreira Prize from Évora University. In 2007, the Portuguese Writers Association and Caixa Geral de Depósitos honoured him with the Literary Life Prize.

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Jacinto do Prado Coelho Essay Prize – Portuguese Association of Literary Critics, 1994
Essay Grand Prix – Portuguese Writers Association, 1994



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[The golden lyre and the melodious tuba]

translated from the Portuguese by Mick Greer

THE EPIC, *THE LUSIADS* AND ANTHOLOGICAL READINGS

The epic poem, as Aristotle explains in *The Poetics*, has a structure which is differentiated from the structure of a tragedy in that it is made up of various stories (*systema polymython*). In other words, its structure is capable of receiving diverse parts (*mere*) which, in their succession or juxtaposition, shape the poem's narrative (See *The Poetics*, 56a 12). The plot (*logos*) of the epic, as in the case of *The Odyssey*, is not, in itself, long and can be summarised in a few lines. This general scheme, however, which is 'proper' (*to idion*) to the poem itself, can be drawn out through episodes (*epeisodia*) which must be appropriate (*oikeia*) to the plot (*op. cit.*, 55b 14-15) and, consequently, not lead to a "story of episodes" which are both unrealistic and unnecessary, as it happens in the poems of bad poets (*op. cit.*, 51b 33ss). If, in tragedy, the term 'episode' has a strictly technical meaning – a complete section of a tragedy between two complete choric songs – in the epic, episodes are relatively autonomous units in terms of the narrative. This makes it possible to prolong, extend or develop (*parateinein*) the plot, creating an organic or appropriate relationship with it, in the Aristotelian sense of the word; or a fatic, accessorial or occasional one. The relation of the episodes to the plot was at the origin of the heated debate within European poetics in the 16th and 17th century concerning the unity of tragic and epic action.

The sheer amount of textual material in the epic poems – generally running to thousands of lines – and the relative structural autonomy of the episodes taking place within them explains why, for many centuries, readers have found it difficult or tiring to read entire epics and have therefore frequently opted to read them in a sort of anthological way, choosing the most important, suggestive or beautiful parts. The *neoteric* poets of the Hellenistic period – Callimachus and Theocritus – and the Roman poets who were their conscious heirs – Catullus, Propertius, Tibullus and Ovid – dismissed the long poem – "big book, big evil", in Callimachus' famous lapidary condemnation – and made an apology for the poem as short, graceful, delicate, formally elegant and well-crafted. They thus established a tradition in western poetry that, as much in terms of *mimesis* and *inuentio* as in *dispositio* and *elocutio*, condemned the epic poem, that long and magniloquent production of heroes and their warlike deeds. Instead, they exalted the concise, technically refined poem, concerned with seduction, Epicurean joy and the torments of love, as was the erotic elegy. The *epyllion*, a reduced or diminutive epos – etymologically-speaking –, was a creation of the Alexandrine



neoteric poets and the Latin *poetae novi* to establish a kind of compromise with the epic tradition. It is a short epic in hexameters, the characteristic metre of the epic, full of erudite references and cultured allusions, well-crafted in form and with a mythological theme, generally amorous.

This poetic tradition, hostile or at least resistant to the long epic poems, was eclipsed for many centuries during the literary megaperiod stretching from the Renaissance to the end of Neoclassicism. Indeed, the Renaissance and Mannerist poets, predominantly Aristotelian, changed the hierarchy of the poetic genres established by Aristotle, setting epic rather than tragedy at the top. The high social position of the epic heroes, such as kings, princes and great lords; the importance and exemplary nature of the actions depicted; the grandeur of the religious, ethical, political and social ideas incorporated in the heroes; the complexity of the poetic dispositio, the wealth and splendour of the *elocutio*; the vast range of religious, philosophical, historical, cosmographic and mythological knowledge invested in the construction of the epic universe; the incomparable prestige of the Graeco-Latin models within the genre, Homer and Virgil particularly; the social and cultural quality of the audience, of the implied and real readers: all these justified the primacy attributed to the epic in the hierarchy of literary genres.¹

Romanticism, despite being the origin of the irreparable decline of the Graeco-Latin epic, which had been canonically consecrated from the Renaissance to Neoclassicism – a decline as much due to poetic as to social and political reasons, on which Hegel wrote memorable pages of aesthetic, anthropological and sociological analysis – continued to admire and cultivate the long poem. This was almost always narrative, with a religious, philosophical, humanistic or historical theme, and took the place in the genealogical system left vacant by the classical epic: Goethe's *Faust*, Wordsworth's *Preludes*, Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, Byron's *Don Juan*, Lamartine's *Jocelyn*, Espronceda's *El Estudiante de Salamanca* and *El Diablo Mundo* and Almeida Garrett's *Camões* are just a few examples.

Nevertheless, at the heart of Romanticism, with its aesthetic made up of various tensions and contradictions, there was a poetic orientation which radically condemned the long poem and that would enjoy much good fortune in later poetic theory and practice, from Baudelaire to Symbolism and into Modernism. What I have in mind is the doctrine put forward by Edgar Allan Poe in *The Poetic Principle*, an essay on poetics in which Poe argues that the value of a poem lies in the extent to which it stimulates a sense of the sublime within the reader. As this sensation is, by its very nature, psychic and brief, a long poem (using 'poem' in the strictest sense) does not exist. The expression "a long poem", therefore, should be considered a contradiction in terms.

¹ On this subject, see Andrea Battistini and Ezio Raimondi, *Le figure della retorica. Una storia letteraria italiana*, Turin, Einaudi, 1990, pp. 13 ff; Siegbert Himmelsbach, *L'épopée ou la "case vide". La réflexion poétologique sur l'épopée nationale en France*, Tübingen, Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1988, passim; Klára Czürös, *Variétés et vicissitudes du genre épique de Ronsard à Voltaire*, Paris, H. Champion, 1999, Ch. I; Daniel Javitch, "Italian epic theory", Glyn P. Norton (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, Vol. 3, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 205-215.



The target of Poe's criticism is the epic, as becomes obvious when he quotes from Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Adopting a poetic position which today we would characterise as revealing a pragmatic-communicational conception of literary phenomenon, Poe stresses that Milton's poem can only be considered poetic when, setting aside unity – the vital requisite for all works of art –, it is read as a series of minor poems equivalent to the episodes of Aristotelian or Neo-Aristotelian poetics. If some reader, with a view to preserving the unity of the poem, undertakes to read it sequentially, with no temporal or textual discontinuity, the result will be constant alternation between excitation and depression. In other words, the reader will be exultant during a passage when true poetry is recognised, and frustrated in another passage, when confronted by the most abject insipidity. From all this, Poe deduces that the final effect – aggregate or absolute – of even the best epic ever to see the light of day, is zero. And after considering that there are a number of good reasons to believe that *The Iliad* is made up of a number of lyric poems, Poe takes up a stance of unequivocal rupture, stating that “The modern epic is, of the supposititious ancient model, but an inconsiderate and blindfold imitation” and that “the day of this artistic anomaly is over”.²

We could say that Poe's criticism of the long poem and, more specifically, of the epic, legitimised the anthological reading of epic poems.³ Theoretically speaking, this legitimisation was reinforced by the aesthetics of Benedetto Croce, with his famous distinction between *poetry* and *literature* and the correlative effect of ‘lyricising’ poetry, which had such a broad and profound influence in the first half of the 20th century.⁴ In the light of Croce's aesthetics, the epic is an enormous *literary* factory, a product of civilisation, of the thinking and ideas of a historical period, with some islands of *poetry*, which are the episodes where the poet's voice, the *lyrical* gives unique and unrepeatable expression to a unique and irreproducible intuition.

In terms of literary practice, the programmes and anthologies adopted in secondary teaching created the norm – and we could say the natural habit – of reading epic poems anthologically. Only in this way could the “literary dinosaur” and the “undigested archeopoetry” into which the epic had transformed or deteriorated, in the irredeemable process of obsolescence or fossilisation announced by Poe, be pedagogically and didactically tolerated and assimilated by teachers and students.⁵

In addition to its strictly pragmatic justification (the enormous length of ancient and modern epics would always make it unfeasible to read them in full in a school context), and its co-validation

² See Edgar Allen Poe, *Essays and Reviews*, New York, The Library of America, 1984, p. 72.

³ In terms of poetics, Poe legitimised the *pour morceaux choisis* reading of the epic, but it is clear that numerous readers were doing it well before him. Chapelain, author of a soporific epic poem, *La Pucelle* (1656), had already complained about such reading practices (See Siegbert Himmelsbach, *op. cit.*, p. 238).

⁴ Benedetto Croce formulated and established the distinction between *poetry* and *literature* in various texts within his vast body of work, but his mature work *La poesia* (1936) provides the most detailed analysis of this terminological and conceptual distinction.

⁵ The expressions “literary dinosaur” and “undigested archeopoetry” are from Daniel Madelénat, *L'épopée*, Paris, P.U.F., 1986, p. 12.

in terms of aesthetic judgement – as Poe had argued, only some parts of an epic are able to give an authentic experience of reading poetry –; the strategy of anthological reading gives the authors and policy makers of school programmes, as well as teachers in general, a broad capacity to manipulate the meaning of poems that, even if archaic and perhaps even archaeological, still have a central place in the literary canon and, more widely, in what could be called the universe of the symbolic power of a language, culture, people or nation.

The Lusiads, inevitably, has not escaped the general fortune of the long epic poems. Readers, over the centuries, have canonised the most suggestive, beautiful, lyrical or dramatic episodes in the canonical poem – the Counsel of the Gods, Venus’ encounter with Jupiter, the story of Inês de Castro, the Old Man of Restelo, Adamastor, the Twelve of England, the Sea Storm, the Isle of Love – implicitly or explicitly sending a large part of the portentous construction of octaves which the poem is into the sphere of the non-read or even unreadable. The principle of reading literary texts as aesthetic fruition formulated by Edgar Allen Poe and accepted by the Impressionist critics and a large number of those currently formulating contemporary literary theory and criticism,⁶ justifies this distinction between aesthetically significant and neutral parts of texts. The canonical status of many literary works is also manifested by how quotable they are, by their aptness to have excerpts removed or collected which then take on a life of their own, often in the form of ingenious or gnomic sayings. *The Lusiads* is, from this perspective, eminently quotable and ideal for anthologies, which successive school programmes have institutionalised and successive generations of teachers and students have put into practice. Its aim is, to some extent, a form of quotation, long quotation, within the anthological framework, tending to cease being a sequence or segment and becoming a discrete text, in the technical sense of the word.

The anthological reading of *The Lusiads*, like any other epic, even if its architecture is ostensibly paratactic, raises the central issue of all hermeneutics: the analysis, consideration and knowledge of how the part relates to the whole and how the whole relates to its parts: the problem of the hermeneutic circle.⁷ On the other hand, from a poetics’ perspective – a perspective which hermeneutics cannot disdain, much less forget, because it has an indelible relationship with the ontology of the poem – anthological reading, as Poe recognised, creates tensions and conflicts with the requisite unity of a work of art and, more specifically, with the Aristotelian principle that the epic structure should “centre upon a single action, whole and complete, having a beginning, a middle and an end, so that like a single complete being, the poem may produce its own special kind of pleasure” (*The Poetics* 59a 17-21).

⁶ If in Impressionist criticism, aesthetic fruition has a significant psychological component, in the stylistic and the New Criticism, the aesthetic fruition is centred on the beauty of forms. In Post Structuralism, even as a reaction to the technical and mechanical reading models of Structuralism, anthropological, imaginative and cognitive-emotional aesthetic factors become dominant in the experience of fruition.

⁷ See Hans-Georg Gadamer’s fundamental study, “Du cercle de la compréhension”, *La philosophie herméneutique*, Paris, P.U.F., 1996, pp. 73-83.



