Sights *from* the South

PORTUGUESE LITERATURE 7

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Ministério da Cultura

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For application forms and more information:

DGLB – Direcção-Geral do Livro e das Bibliotecas
internacional@dglb.pt
www.dglb.pt

Campo Grande, 83 – 1.°
P- 1700-088 Lisboa
Phone: (+351) 21 7982091/2
Fax: (+351) 21 7982141

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INTRODUCTION

This is the seventh edition of *Sights from the South – Portuguese Literature*, the magazine published by the General Directorate for Books and Libraries (DGLB) to bring Portuguese writers to the attention of readers around the world. It aims to increase awareness of our Translation Support Programme, the success of which is seen year after year in the growing number of proposals that we receive from all over the world for the translation of Portuguese and Lusophone writers. We interpret this interest both as a signal of the universality of what is written in Portugal today and, above all, as a sign of the quality of many of our authors. As in previous volumes, in *Sights from the South* no. 7 we present a choice of poets and fiction writers, while adding a young playwright for the first time, as we hope to open a window onto the renewed vitality of theatrical texts from Portugal – texts that are closely linked to the production of stimulating shows and the country's lively dramatic arts scene.

In fiction we have selected excerpts from novels from 2009. All three exemplify contemporary narrative techniques that, while still telling a story and being anchored in the narrative traditions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, work with modes of narration to create differentiated styles and voices. The three fiction writers (João de Melo, b. 1949; Dulce Maria Cardoso, b. 1964; Rui Zink, b. 1961), all established and respected writers, use structured techniques with what we can call narrative voice, suggesting new directions in their work and in the contemporary panorama of fiction in Portuguese. We would like to draw your attention to the fact that Dulce Maria Cardoso's novel *Os meus sentimentos* [My feelings] (2005) has just been awarded the European Union Prize for Literature 2009.

The poets introduced here, Daniel Jonas (b. 1973) and Manuel de Freitas (b. 1972), are heterodox voices in the rich context of Portuguese poetry, and for this reason: originals. Both were born in the early seventies and show a great interest in today's world. To portray it, they start from echoes of classic and modern poetry, their verses are freighted with cultural references, but retain a natural flow that is almost oral, making them accessible to any reader. There are recognisable references to music, painting, and Portuguese and international poetry, evincing a cosmopolitanism that is not mere decoration, rather it establishes the foundations for a knowledgeable and well-read writing, under the cover of a fluid discourse. These two poets are discrete, little seen in public – perhaps because what interests them is life's hidden side, the one that the most profound and beautiful poetry can express.

As for José Maria Vieira Mendes (b. 1976), the young playwright we wish to showcase, his work exemplifies the organic nature of contemporary theatre. He learnt as an insider, as a craftsman of its staging and texts, combining lessons learnt from classic playwrights with those of the greatest of today's writers to create his own voice, which is already experienced and perfectly visible.

This volume of *Sights from the South*, we can happily say, displays with clarity the great variety of directions which Portuguese literature is moving in today. The DGLB and the Ministry of Culture are therefore following one of the guiding principles of their mission: to make available to readers of the whole world the best that can be read in Portuguese today, on a level with the most vivid and solid literary expression from anywhere in the world.

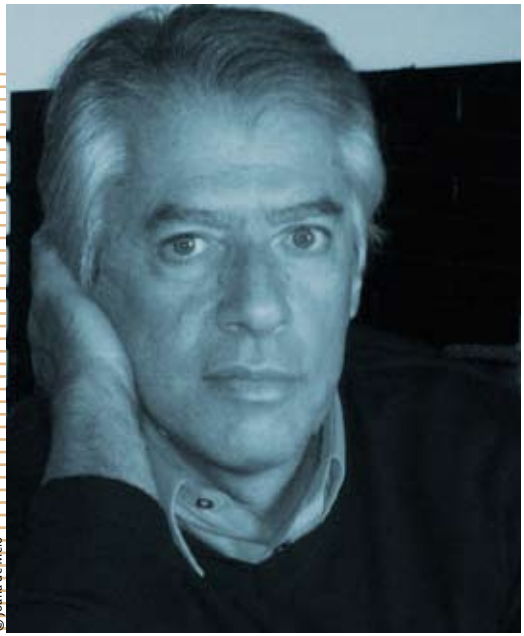
PAULA MORÃO | *Director of DGLB*

fiction

João de Melo

Dulce Maria Cardoso

Rui Zink



João de Melo

(Azores, 1949)

RIGHTS CONTACT:

LEYA / DOM QUIXOTE

Cecília Andrade

cecilandrade@dquixote.leya.com

WWW.DQUIXOTE.PT

_ ABOUT THE AUTHOR

João de Melo was born in the Azores in 1949 and moved to the Portuguese mainland to study. He left Lisbon University having graduated in Romance Studies, and was a secondary school teacher and university lecturer. Today he lives and works in Madrid.

He is the author and editor of twenty books, ranging from essays and anthologies to poetry, novels and short stories. A number of these books have brought him Portuguese and foreign prizes, and have been adapted for the theatre and cinema, as well as having been translated into many languages. João de Melo's work is published by Dom Quixote (Grupo Leya).

_ SELECTED WORKS

Luxúria branca e Gabriela, short story illustrated by Francisco Simões, 2009
A divina miséria (novella), 2009
O vinho, short story illustrated by Paula Rego, 2007
O mar de Madrid (novel) 2006
As coisas da alma (short stories), 2003
Antologia do conto português (ed.), 2002
Açores, o segredo das ilhas (travel text), 2000
O homem suspenso (novel), 1996
Dicionário de paixões (chronicles) 1994
Bem-aventuranças (short stories), 1992
Gente feliz com lágrimas (novel), 1988
Os anos da guerra, (ed., anthology), 1988
Entre pássaro e anjo (short stories), 1987
Autópsia de um mar de ruínas (novel), 1984
O meu mundo não é deste reino (novel), 1983

_ PRIZES

Fernando Namora Literary Prize, 1989 – for the work *Gente feliz com lágrimas*
APE/DGLB Grand Prize for fiction, 1988 – for the work *Gente feliz com lágrimas*
Christopher Columbus Prize, 1988 – for the work *Gente feliz com lágrimas*
Eça de Queiroz Prize from the Lisbon Town Hall, 1988 – for the work *Gente feliz com lágrimas*
RDP Antena 1 Literature Prize, 1988 – for the work *Gente feliz com lágrimas*
Fiction Prize from the Cultural Association 'A Balada', 1987 – for the work *Entre pássaro e anjo*
Diniz da Luz Prize from Nordeste Council, 1983 – for the work *O meu mundo não é deste reino*

_ TRANSLATIONS

Bulgarian
Gente feliz com lágrimas, translated by Plamen Ouchev. Sofia: Karina-Mariana Todorova, 2001

Dutch
Gelukkige mensen met tranen, translated by Hennie Bos. Amesterdam: De Prom, 1991

English
My world is not of this kingdom, translated by Gregory Rabassa. Minneapolis: Aliform Pub, 2003

French
Des gens heureux parmi les larmes, translated by Claude Barrousse. Arles: Actes Sud,1992

German
Der Mann in der Schwebe, translated by Maralde Meyer-Minnemann. Frankfurt: TFM Verlag, 1997

Italian
Gente felice con lacrime, translated by Clelia Bettini. Roma: Cavallo di ferro, 2007
Atopsia di un mare di rovine, translated by Agnese Purgatorio. Roma: Cavallo di ferro, 2005

Spanish
Mar de Madrid, translated by Rebeca Hernández Alonso. Ourense: Linteo, 2009
Mi mundo no es de este reino, translated by Rebeca Hernández Alonso. Ourense: Linteo, 2007
Gente feliz con lagrimas, translated by Eduardo Naval. Madrid: Alfaguara, 1992

Romanian
Oameni Fericiti Printre Lacrimi, translated by Odette Margaritescu. Bucarest: Univers, 1997

_ SYNOPSIS:

There are stories, characters and creations about the world that can live with us for years and years, becoming part of our imaginative life and reviving in us the language of the so-called social and political 'systems' of our times. This is the case with this novella. *A divina miséria* [*Divine misery*] has taken on a life of its own, separate from its author, presenting us with the image of modern obscurantism. Earthly and heavenly powers are the theme of this literature that pushes at the imagination's own limits. It is a living being one step removed from its creator. The novella tells us of a new 'trinity': the triumph of religion over the symbolic death of the Church; the collision between what is human and what is transcendent; and the overwhelming invading power of today's world, which is stronger than God and the absolute lord of humanity.

> *João de Melo's remarkable novel graphically portrays the world of the Azorean emigrant during the second half of this century. It also underlines the bittersweet realization that in general family ties are fragile indeed.* (Gente feliz com lágrimas)
>
> RICHARD A. PRETO-RODAS, *WORLD LITERATURE TODAY*

> *We owe one of the most beautiful books of the 1980s to João de Melo,* My world is not of this kingdom. *With a boldness and violence rare in recent Portuguese novels, passions and smaller feelings collide in a world ordered according to an amorous, romantic, religious islander's imagination.*
>
> FRANCISCO JOSÉ VIEGAS, *LER MAGAZINE*

> Autopsy of a sea in ruins, *perhaps the most beautiful book that could be written on the theme of colonial war, is not just a fiction woven superbly from real facts and personal experience, it is also a funeral song visited by poetry and which transmits the call of life over death.*
>
> REGINA LOURO, *EXPRESSO*

A DIVINA MISÉRIA [DIVINE MISERY]
by João de Melo
Lisbon: Dom Quixote, 2009
120 pp.

excerpt from: A DIVINA MISÉRIA [DIVINE MISERY]

translated from the Portuguese by Margaret Jull Costa

As you know, sir, the death of a man always creates infinite disorder. The objects that belonged to him are immediately rendered worthless as far as life is concerned, quite useless; they fall into torpor and inertia, are left vacant, without purpose or soul. They lack the movement, blood and warmth of the hands that once used them. They lack the time, age and health for which they were created. Above all, sir, they lack being. Matter itself shrinks into the slowly cooling shadows and eventually vanishes from every corner of the house, which also ends up fading and changing colour. The air becomes unbreathable, the sun unnecessary, oblique. And everything is extinguished, everything ceases to be real. An object's reason for being lies not in its material nature, but, rather, in existential metaphysics, which is the explanation for each and every object; indeed, it is only when objects die that we fully understand the meaning of their existence.

I say this, sir, because I saw with my own eyes how the mirrors in the hall, when they received the priest's last breath, his dying sigh, became covered in a velvety layer of watery drops - as if that final expiration had flown to meet them at that very instant – and I saw how they ceased to be the discreet eyes of the house. The dead man's memory fled his body. It was seemingly tethered to hidden aspects of what, until then, had been his world, but which now seemed to us strangely distant and inert, almost empty, as if the wild winds of oblivion had swept it clean.

You see, sir, I had never been in the priest's house before. I had neither the life nor the stomach for it. I was, at the time, a man with a thousand trades and a thousand roads to follow. The world survived, but do you know how and why? Because I drove out the rats and mice. Up and down hills and along roads, I would play my hurdy-gurdy at the top of the main street in every village in Nordeste, and crowds of men and women would come running to seek my help. You could see in their eyes that their lives were burdened down with poverty and hopeless sadness. They either had granaries plagued with mice for me to exterminate or they would bring me knives and scissors and agricultural tools to be sharpened with a file, an emery wheel or even sandpaper; or they would present me with umbrellas with broken ribs and springs, and other implements requiring the skills of a mechanic – a mechanic of everything and more

besides. I would sharpen adzes, saws, handsaws, ploughshares, scythes to cut wheat with or to clear brambles; you name it, I sharpened it. People would ask me to pass on messages for them, to make international phone calls, to post letters and run endless errands for them in the Town, where I fetched documents and parcels or made enquiries and entered foolish claims at the council office or at the notary public. For this they paid me what they thought fit or what they could afford, but I never lacked for work, because the truth is there wasn't in the whole of Nordeste a ratcatcher like me. I set traps wherever mice and rats were likely to gather: in sheds, granaries and fruit stores, and in the lofts where they kept the wheat, beans and sweet potatoes and the forage for the cattle. The houses became prisoners – no – hostages to my traps, as did the small fish in the net I hung between the rocks, as did the birds in the nets I slung among the reedbeds – and meanwhile I sharpened sewing scissors and kitchen knives, and chopped firewood. Then I would go and take a look at my traps. The creatures would be dying in their hundreds, impaled on the hard springs of my contraptions, tail and legs in the air, eyes staring and tongue sticking out. I would dig them a grave in the garden; out of pity, I would help them to die and bury them in piles and more piles, so that the world would be cleansed of and safe from such plagues. At the beginning of October or November, whenever the weather announced the change of season, I would become a charcoal burner. I had a kind of kiln of my own invention, an enclosed oven, in which the smoke and heat were carefully controlled, and where the wood burned away day and night on its own, until the fire went out of its own accord and the wood had been transformed into great lumps of charcoal, which, when the cold weather came, I would sell by weight or by the bag. As you see, sir, leading such a life, how would I have had the time or the patience for priests and masses? Which is why, as I said, I had never been in that house before.

Apart from the two or three women who had always taken care of his day-to-day needs, and a few tradesmen who, long ago, had whitewashed the walls and restored the wooden floors and the furniture, no one here in Rozário could tell you a single thing about the parish priest's house. His private life was equally secret, for no one knew anything of his habits or even if he had any illnesses, nor if he had ever succumbed to one of those vices people cultivate in the privacy, peace and comfort of their own home. In sixty years of service to the parish, he was never known to have missed – for reasons of illness, a cold or whatever – a single mass or baptism or marriage or death, or even a novena or a funeral. People had become used to thinking that their priest was a person who lived outside his own flesh-and-blood time, that he enjoyed the kind of eternal good health one reads about in ancient myths, that he was as old as the streets, the church, even the coral in the sea, even the eternity of the oceans and the heavens. Indeed, so elusive and ageless did he seem to us that some went so far as to say that not even God had seen him born. Since he had never been young, they assumed he would never be old either, far less ill. Others said, on the contrary, that he was just a stubborn old man, slow-witted, indiscreet, and at the mercy of the whims of his ecclesiastical humours. However, far more so than the omnipresent God (who had a reputation for being rather absent-minded),

the priest always kept a close eye on everything, at all times, everywhere: on the days and the doings of Rozário, on the light and the shade, on the commission of sins and on the confessions of the repentant, he was absolute lord of our souls, of our most private thoughts, of the ploughed fields and the divine glory that each of us dreamed of for ourselves and for our loved ones.

That was why his death came as such a shock.

As I say, I had never been in that house because I am, by nature, opposed to anything to do with priests, be they alive or dead. I had never imagined the kind of breath that would impregnate, for years and years (for more than half a century), the four walls of a house built on a priest's mysteries and mistakes, but I saw the eyes of the cats - quick to anger and apparently roused from their idleness – narrow and flicker. I saw awaken in those creatures the old, wild instinct of all felines: when they stretched out their front legs, where they lazed in the October sunshine, their claws were as sharp as slow knives, ready to scratch anyone who dared approach. Then they performed acrobatic leaps from the cupboards to the tables, and from there to the dusty wooden kneelers, infested with mice nests and cobwebs, worthless now and useless, and therefore of no use to religion either. Terrified, the women huddled together in one corner of the room. Then they armed themselves with brooms, clogs, slippers and wooden ladles, ready to confront the beasts, and they made such a clatter that it ceased being a wake, a funeral or an act of devotion. It was what you might call a mutiny on board ship, a war between the pirates of the house and the blood widows of the man who was now only supernatural – with no body, no existential presence, whose clocks and faith in eternity had, ultimately, proved of no account, given that he would have already appeared at the Final Judgement to find out what place had been reserved for him in the beyond, in the so-called eternal life in which he believed.

'The little devils fly over the furniture like some kind of mad bird,' declared the boldest of the widows present. She had the thick, implacable wrists of a midwife, but she, too, scuttled back to join her colleagues, alarmed by these furious felines.

When I tried to stroke them in order to calm them down, sir, the cats defended themselves with their claws, as if I had come there to destroy their nests. They did, in fact, resemble birds of prey, for they dug their nails into the back of my hand, bit my fingers and scratched my face, and I could see in their eyes the same murderous glint you get in the eyes of wild beasts cornered in their lair.

'They're on heat!' I said, quite wrongly, forgetting that we were not even in the right month for the round, pregnant, white moons of which cats are so fond.

'What do mean "on heat"!' declared another of the priest's widows when she saw my bewilderment. 'Don't talk such nonsense! It's just that the devil's got into their blood.'

'Exactly!' added a third woman. 'It's the soul of that dear saint who has not yet reached his destination. We must give him time to cross the River of the Dead and reach Paradise.'

At the mere thought of the dead man, they forgot all about the cats and started to cry again. They did so in chorus, each one tolling the bell of her own grief, and do you know what I did, sir? I tried to get as far away from there as I could. I disconnected myself from the world. I realised that

if I didn't detach myself from their woes and foolishness, I would go as mad as them, infected by the voices that were once more bemoaning the dead man and his misfortune.

Maybe you've never known or experienced such a thing, but the symphonic weeping of women is truly unbearable, it tears you apart inside. Such a lack of good sense splits you asunder; you fear to stay there, among those devout old widows, listening to them weep and wail and moan, a music that rises up directly from the hell within us all and that quickly softens the will, the hardness, the specific density of one's being.

As I said, I had ended up at the house completely by chance, brought there by that dreadful night in the parish of Rozário, summoned by the cries of Calheta the sacristan – do you remember him? – who started ringing the big bell that only gets rung when there's a fire or a cyclone approaching or some even greater disaster, and who kept shouting:

'Our priest is dead, our priest is dead, our priest is dead...'

I arrived surrounded by that terrible all-enveloping confusion of bells and shouts and hurrying footsteps. The house quickly filled up with a whole tumult of crazy people. So great was the weight, the thunder of steps, the hubbub, the horror of those responding to the news of his death, that the parish priest's house seemed about to take wing and then crash down upon our heads. The bells rang wildly on and on, whether to call the people to church, I don't know, or merely to infect us with their grief.

There were a lot of other people as well, hunting for Guilherme-José, my eldest brother, who had hanged my poor sister-in-law from a beam. He was somewhere wandering the hills and valleys, fleeing the anger of these people, who had so often sworn in vain to see *him* hanged and his soul crucified. But the hours passed (the long, cold, forgotten hours of dawn) and there was still no sign of Guilherme-José, no chance to split open that simian skull of his with one good blow of an axe, as I myself had vowed to do as soon as I saw him or had hold of him. There was no earthly justice for my poor sister-in-law Glória, who had remained there, hanging, still warm, her face tinged bluish-purple, in the sacked and plundered, later deserted and, I believe, for ever accursèd house. The poor thing swayed on her gallows of a beam, so thin and with the mice already sniffing at her – and I still carry within me, even now, the vision of her hanging there in their bedroom, her swollen sex agape and the click of her bones almost detached from her body. No one would avenge the extreme thinness of that woman who retained her long-suffering look even in death, having been used and abused at home and often beaten by her sadistic husband, my brother, and whose silence marked for ever the secret, the awful emptiness of that house. (Now, it's just a haunted house, rotting from damp and neglect. They say that the angels of the night are circumcised there by ladies with cloven feet. I know nothing about that. It may all be legend, superstition, shadows, old wives' tales put about by the people of the parish.)

Half the population had gathered at the door of the presbytery. The other half, as I told you, responded quite differently to the bells. Bells or dogs, I didn't care. Sirens or wild beasts in turmoil, everything that night seemed designed either to excite or to exalt the minds of the inhabitants, torn between plundering my brother's house and hunting for the murderous creature in the nearby woods. As for him, my vile brother, not a sign. He had disappeared without leaving behind so much as a trail of slime. Perhaps the Devil carried him off. He may have been swallowed up by the sea or have dissolved in the fetid air or dug his own grave and clambered in so as to go straight down to the depths of Hell, but no one can say for sure. The fact is that his aura vanished into thin air, flying who knows where and expanding into legends, rumours and other imaginings. One moment, he was said to be living a rich and successful life in the Town, the next, nothing of the sort. He had merely absented himself from the numbers of the living. Ballads were sung about him, the one about the widower haunted by his dead wife's longing for revenge, the song of the drowned man on the beach in the morning luring children into the sea, the legend of the angel who perched on the masts of non-existent ships...

(...)

Dulce Maria Cardoso

(Trás-os-Montes, 1964)

RIGHTS CONTACT:

Anja Saile Literary Agent

ANJASAILE@HOTMAIL.COM

_ ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in Trás-os-Montes in 1964, Dulce Maria Cardoso spent a part of her childhood in Angola, returning to Portugal in 1975. She graduated in law. She has written scripts for cinema and short stories. *Campo de sangue* [Field of blood] was her first novel, written with the help of a grant for 'literary creation' from the Portuguese Ministry of Culture (1999) and awarded the 'Acontece' Grand Prize for fiction.

Her second novel *Os meus sentimentos* [My feelings] confirmed her position in the vanguard of contemporary Portuguese fiction. She has been included in various anthologies of short stories in Portugal and abroad, and her novels have been published in France, Brazil, Argentina, Spain, Italy and the Netherlands.

Dulce Maria Cardoso's work is published by ASA (Grupo Leya), who recently published her third novel, *O chão dos pardais* [Sparrow ground], which we present here.

_ SELECTED WORKS

O chão dos pardais (novel), 2009
Até nós (short stories), 2008
Os meus sentimentos (novel), 2005
Campo de sangue (novel), 2002

_ PRIZES

European Union Prize for Literature, 2009 –
for the work *Os meus sentimentos*
'Acontece' Grand Prize for fiction, 2002 –
for the work *Campo de sangue*

_ TRANSLATIONS

Dutch

Violeta en de engelen, translated by Harrie Lemmens.
Amesterdam: Meulenhoff, 2009

Italian

Campo di sangue, translated by Daniele Petruccioli.
Roma: Voland, 2007
Le mie condoglianze, translated by Daniele Petruccioli.
Roma: Voland, 2007

French

Les anges, Violeta, translated by Cécile Lombard. Paris:
L'esprit des péninsules, 2006
Cœurs arrachés, translated by Cécile Lombard.
Paris: Phébus, 2005

Spanish

Campo de sangre. Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo, 2005

Catalan

Camp de sang, translated by Marta Ferré Freiras-Morna
and Antoni Picornell Belenguer. Mallorca: El Gall, 2006

Brazilian Edition

Campo de Sangue. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras,
2005

O CHÃO DOS PARDAIS [SPARROW GROUND]
by Dulce Maria Cardoso
ASA, 2009
224 pp.

_ SYNOPSIS:

Afonso is an extremely powerful man, perhaps nothing can get to him – except the years that pass and age him almost as much as anyone else. For a long time the only youth he has known has been in the bodies of his lovers. In Sofia for instance, who hates him and loves Júlio. Meanwhile his wife, Alice, has given up, not even she really knows what she has given up. Their children have grown up and left, without leaving. Their daughter Clara translates useless books and falls for Elisaveta. Their son Manuel is a plastic surgeon, waiting to be sentenced to a postponed love for a distant woman whom he meets on his computer screen.

The novel begins with the preparations for Afonso's sixtieth birthday party. Before and after the party, before and after the tragedy that ruins it, the novel explores the forces that throw some characters up against others, whether to love or hate each other. Not forgetting, among all these forces, the vertical force of gravity that sends all the falling bodies sprawling on the ground.

Even so, it seems it should be easy to be happy. Yet the characters almost always run smack into an incapacity for happiness. A strange and surprising inability that stops everything and leaves them uncommunicative.

This lack of communication does not derive from the different languages which they, at times, are speaking. Everything is translatable. Everything is translated. But to know, individually, all the words being articulated is not the same as understanding what is said. It is almost never the same. Perhaps the silence of enigmatic Eugénia, who has been the family's maid for ever, is more eloquent than the others' hullabaloo. Perhaps Gustavo, the biographer, tells most when he leaves things out.

I have read and will read everything by Dulce Maria Cardoso. 'It is known that those who drown do not find rest in heaven,' writes this author from Trás-os-Montes, who returned from Angola in the tragic year of 1975. She was born in the same bed in which her mother and grandmother were born. She knows everything about life. Even what only men know. A femininity of feeling adds a gentle touch to every line, softens every page. I drowned in her writing, without finding rest. I will read on.

JOSÉ ANTÓNIO BARREIROS

excerpt from: O CHÃO DOS PARDAIS [SPARROW GROUND]

translated from the Portuguese by Margaret Jull Costa

Princesses never die. They get married and live happily ever after.

'The idea has to surface when I least expect it,' says Alice, 'that's how it always is. I mustn't get in a state about it.'

She's sitting on the sofa. On her lap is an empty notebook and she has just written on one sheet, in large letters, a list of ideas for presents for Afonso. She has carefully drawn five arrows which she then numbered. Since then, she has written nothing else. This is the seventh list she has started since she sat down on the sofa.

She surveys the living room. She curls a lock of hair, as blonde as a doll's, around the index finger of her left hand.

'How does one think of an idea?' she asks in the wispy tones she has been cultivating since she was an adolescent. 'How?'

She tears up the piece of paper. The torn-up remains join the pile of scraps to the left of the sofa. She takes another sheet. As long as the sheet is blank, everything seems possible.

'Nothing ever happens,' she says very slowly, 'anything could happen, and yet almost nothing ever does.'

She looks at her shadow on the wall. Her gestures do not quite coincide with those of her shadow. She opens and closes her hand several times, watching that slight delay.

A very beautiful young woman runs down a narrow, deserted street. She stumbles in her black patent leather stilettos. Her tight skirt will not allow her to run any faster. Alice is always getting distracted by the images that appear in her mind. It's night-time. The street is flanked by high walls. The woman is wearing a little three-quarter-sleeve jacket and a blouse with purple flowers on it and the first three buttons undone. The woman has very dark skin. Her black mesh stockings make her legs look longer than they are. The woman is very tired. She leans against one of the walls, breathing hard. Her very red lips are a neatly drawn heart. The woman lets herself slide down the wall until she's sitting on the ground. She tries to maintain her composure, and so sits with her legs together and bent to one side, the way ladies, a long time ago, used to sit at picnics. The shadow appears on the wall. The body, as it approaches, gets larger and larger until it's too big for the wall. The ground is now entirely filled by the

shadow. The woman says something unintelligible. She pleads. Her large, very dark eyes are full of fear. Somewhere very low down, on the ground, a cricket sings. Softly.

'If I can hear the crickets sing, I must still be a child. What happened in the meantime?'

Alice looks at her wristwatch and then at the clock on the sideboard. The clock on the sideboard never tells the same time as the other clocks. There is always a difference of two or three minutes between that clock and the others. Sometimes it's five minutes. But never more than five.

The clock on the sideboard has, as a pendulum, a very plump angel sitting on a swing with its small round feet going back and forth. Alice bought the angel clock, as she calls it, from an antique shop during the first winter she spent in the city. A very gentle sun was shining, wrapping everything in a kind of soft blanket. Alice was wearing a blue velvet beret that went very well with her blue eyes and her yellow hair. Men looked at her. Even the most respectable men. Alice knew what they were thinking and she enjoyed being looked at like that by men. The city has changed though. If she went out in the street now wearing her blue beret, the men wouldn't look at her like that. No, the city has changed.

When the giant shadow moves, it makes the light flicker, so that it seems as if it were the fallen woman who was moving. Far off, a ship's siren sounds as it leaves the dock. The woman tries to get up, she presses her hands against the white wall to push herself up. Her irregular breathing causes her to open her mouth and thus appear even more defenceless. She slides back down onto the ground which is made of white and black stones in the form of stars. Small stars. Bigger stars. Other smaller ones. The ship's siren thickens the fog that is gathering in concentric circles around the yellowish light of the streetlamp further on. It feels as if you could touch the fog. Now it looks like candy floss. The woman grabs the shadow's shoe with both hands. It's a man's shoe in brown leather with a silver bar on one side. The woman clings to the leg and is dragged along. She is pleading. The shadow's body moves off, despite the woman's hand holding on to its leg. The hand is wearing a diamond ring and the long nails are painted dark red.

'All clocks should tell the same time,' says Alice.

She has never done anything to synchronise the clocks, just as what happens inside and outside her head is out of synch. Such things are too insignificant to bother with.

'Three minutes is nothing. Apart from in films, of course.'

She spends a lot of time watching films, shut up in the smallest, darkest room in the basement, sitting on the gold velvet armchair that belonged to her father. The gold long ago ceased to be gold. It's grown dirty and faded and is now a colour that has no name. Grubby. No one else comes into her film room, not even Eugénia who is always creeping noiselessly around the house, as if her feet didn't touch the ground when she walked. Alice would swear this was so, that Eugénia's feet didn't touch the ground when she walked.

No one used to go into her father's study when he was working either. Her father's work consisted of opening the newspaper, smoothing the pages, holding them at eye-level, then light-

ing a cigarette, usually from the one he was about to put out, and coughing, filling his glass with whisky, knocking it back, putting the glass down beside the ice bucket that was replenished every three hours, and once again smoothing his newspaper, refilling his glass, lighting another cigarette and coughing, while Alice's mother and aunts embroidered or played patience in the living room that looked out on the field where the horses were kept. Many years later, when the house was put up for auction, a clerk listed on the inventory three metal rings on the north wall of the house, which would presumably have been used to tether the horses and which, perhaps through lack of use, had grown rusty. When the weather turned colder, Alice's mother and aunts would sit around the special table, with the brazier underneath, and which was always covered with a floor-length green baize cloth, on top of which was placed a shorter one in white crochet-work. That room looked out onto the peacock garden, which the same clerk described as being a south-facing walled park measuring four hundred and eighty square metres.

But neither of those rooms, nor any other room in the house, smelled of cigarettes and papers as her father's study had. None of the women had her father's noisy, persistent cough either, a cough that could be heard throughout the house. None of them drank whisky or fell asleep with a lighted cigarette in her mouth. No, what nonsense, her father never fell asleep, as her mother and aunts were always telling her, he was just thinking, that was all, he had a lot to think about. Occasionally, one of the women would mention the danger of fire, but one of the others would immediately tell her to be quiet.

Alice used to love hearing the sound of her father's breathing, which was very different from that of her mother's or her aunts'; theirs was a silent, easy breathing like that of anyone else who came in from the street. Visitors. We have visitors today, she would be told, you must behave yourself. The visitors said that Alice was an adorable child, and it was good to be adorable. One of Alice's wishes was to be able to breathe like her father, making those whistling noises when her chest rose and fell. Her father laughed out loud when Alice confessed to this desire. She loved to make her father laugh, but this was even more difficult than learning how to breathe that whistling breath.

'Eight minutes to midnight.' Alice looks at the angel clock. 'Oh, I do feel sick.'

If she had said, oh, I do feel bored, she would be obliged to experience it in a different way, because naming things always has consequences. Alice chose to blame the salad dressing she'd had at supper. It was easier that way.

'There isn't a single mistake in this room,' she said, stretching her arms, interlacing her fingers, turning her palms out and yawning. 'Aesthetic mistakes are the worst because, as well as being incurable, they're contagious.'

In a week's time, her husband will turn sixty, and Alice wants to give him an unforgettable present, although she has no idea what. That is why she is writing, again, on a clean sheet of paper, what she has just thought. This time, she places the word 'journey' inside a rather imperfect circle. Then she draws an arrow pointing to the right-hand side of the paper. In smaller

letters, she notes down various options and then opens an equally asymmetrical bracket. Next to the bracket she writes, 'desert'. Then adds: 'luxury trip to the desert'.

She studies what she has just written for a few seconds, then slowly shakes her head and crosses it out. Slowly. Calmly. With the indifference of one performing a necessary task.

'At least I haven't actually had to correct anything yet,' she says victoriously.

Mistakes are merely evidence that she should have been cleverer. We learn nothing from mistakes that we couldn't have learned if we hadn't made them.

'Sixty. How did we get to be so old?'

She smiles. She shakes her head vehemently.

'We still look so young,' she says, her eyes wide, as if someone had disagreed with her.

She bends forward and picks up a glass of ginger ale from the coffee table in front of the sofa. She takes a sip. She carefully runs her tongue over her rose-pink-painted lips so as not to spoil the lipstick she had applied immediately after supper. It was then that she smiled at the mirror. To confirm that she still has a pretty smile, that she is still a pretty woman. She did not add, 'for her age', as her friends usually did.

Outside, beyond the windows that fill the whole of one side of the room, is the river - a liquid, glittering blackness. The river can be seen from the sofa where Alice is sitting or from any other place in the room, because the room was built around the river.

'The river's always so monotonous.' This complaint goes with her doll-blonde hair, her rose-pink lipstick and the strappy yellow sandals beside the sofa. 'If only the banks...'

She often talks to herself, which is probably why she has got into the habit of not finishing her sentences. It's impossible to pinpoint the origin of a habit, to know which came first, the gesture or the need for it.

The river is a tiny bit brighter than the dark sky. A tiny bit more tremulous. A tiny bit more accessible. But still very dark.

Afonso travels a lot, that's why a journey would never be an unforgettable present. Even now he's far away. Work, he said. 'Work' is what he says more and more frequently, but he also announces his absences with other words. Alice hates it when her husband uses the word 'business', which she considers to be the height of bad taste. No one has ever asked her why and no one has ever contradicted her. However, that doesn't make it any more fragile a belief than beliefs that have had to fight their corner.

'What if I were to offer him time, a lot of time?' she says excitedly.

This seems a real possibility. No one should underestimate the treachery with which absurd ideas take hold of those who are alone.

'It's not my fault,' she says angrily. 'What can I give the man who has always had everything?'

She has nearly finished her ginger ale. Alice gets irritated. Things should only finish when one no longer wants them. Now that the ginger ale is nearly gone, she is thirsty. If Eugénia were

still up, she would send for a maid or she herself would go and get her another drink. Leaving nothing unfinished is one of Eugénia's tasks. But Eugénia always goes to bed very early. The night was meant for sleeping. And for sinners. That's what her mother used to tell her, when Alice asked her if she could stay up a little late. Do you want to be a sinner, her mother would ask. No, I don't. Do you want to go to hell, her mother would insist, and an increasingly frightened Alice would again say No. Her mother would smile and stroke her head. Good girl, good girl. It was the same gesture and same voice she used with the dogs that lived in the house and that used to greet them, tails wagging, when they returned from some excursion. Good dog, good dog, her mother would say, patting each of them with her delicate white hands when she got out of the car that the driver would then park in the garage and cover with a beige dust sheet. The car spent a lot of time in the garage covered up. They rarely left the house.

When they were children, Alice used to go to bed much earlier than Eugénia. You'll go to hell, Alice would say if she happened to see Eugénia, who stayed on in the kitchen to dry the plates that Eugénia's mother, wearing an impeccably white apron, was very carefully washing in the square marble sink. Eugénia never responded and never seemed afraid either, which led Alice to believe that Eugénia already knew what hell was like and had no fear of it.

Eugénia and Alice were born in the same house and on the same day, but eleven hours apart and in different rooms. Eugénia was born in one of the windowless rooms in the annex where the servants lived. Alice was born in a sunny room with a view of the chestnut tree. Perhaps that's why they have never been friends. Perhaps friendship requires rather more than a shared birth date.

She gets up from the sofa and goes to fetch another ginger ale. When she passes the angel clock, 31 August 1997 has already spent seventeen of its two thousand four hundred and forty minutes. On her way to the kitchen, taking care to walk elegantly, she repeats out loud all the ideas she has come up with for Afonso's present. The noise that Alice has difficulty in recognising is the phone ringing. It's very rare for the phone to ring at that hour.

It can't be Afonso. Afonso only rings once a day and always at a respectable hour, as he did today, to say that it's hot or cold, that he's eaten well or not so well. Not that Alice cares, but, of course, they have to talk about something, especially when it's a long-distance call.

She runs to the phone. She has to pick it up before whoever is calling assumes she's asleep and rings off. If that happened, she would spend all night wondering who it could have been. And not even the thought that it could have been a wrong number would calm her. The telephone is on the other side of the room, which suddenly grows larger.

Manuel and Clara. It's been a long time since her children have needed her help in any way. Unless Manuel or Clara, or even Afonso, who has already phoned today, unless... She brushes aside the thought of some piece of bad news. She answers. Her finger is trembling slightly.

'Darling, something dreadful has happened.'

The voice is familiar, but Alice can't identify whose it is. Her friend has to say her name.

'Darling,' and Alice's joy is genuine, 'I'm so glad to hear from you, how could I not have recognised your voice, oh, darling, do forgive me, pay no attention, I was so deep in thought that...'

'Princess Diana is dying.'

'No.'

Her friend says it again.

'Oh, that's so sad, that's the saddest thing I've ever heard,' says Alice in a still wispier voice.

'It was a car accident, a horrible car accident.'

Alice sighs. Her friend's tone of voice is wrong. Such news requires the right tone of voice.

'They had been to supper at the Ritz. Dodi died at once. Oh, darling, it's all so awful. So absurdly awful. Dodi had just bought her an engagement ring. He was going to propose as soon as they got home.'

Eugénia appears in the room. She is wearing the blouse and skirt she had worn during the day. Either she had not yet gone to bed or she had got dressed again when she heard the phone ring. Unless, of course, she sleeps fully clothed. Alice has never dared to speculate about Eugénia.

'I heard the phone.'

Alice doesn't respond to Eugénia.

'It was all the fault of the photographers chasing them,' says her friend, 'it was their fault that they crashed into a pillar.'

'It's all right. You can go to bed,' says Alice, covering the mouthpiece.

Eugénia withdraws. She says goodnight when she is already out of the room. Alice doesn't respond.

'The photographs must be awful. They say the princess won't survive. She's really badly injured. Poor thing. I never thought she would be happy with Dodi. They belonged to such different worlds. It was obvious they had no future together, but who could have imagined an accident like that? My daughter was devastated when she heard. I spoke to her just now. And the children are just about to start school.'

'It'll be all right,' Alice says to calm her friend. 'She'll pull through. I'm sure of it.'

'They'd been on holiday on Dodi's yacht.'

'I know,' says Alice. 'I know.'

On the cover of the magazine Alice bought today, the princess is perched on the end of a diving board, high above the sea, and wearing a turquoise swimming suit. She's holding on to the board with her hands, and her feet are dangling free. In yesterday's magazine, she was pictured on the deck of the yacht, kissing Dodi. His very dark, hairy hands were resting on her very white body. The kind of satiny body only princesses have.

'Apparently two American tourists saw it all. I'm sure it will be on the TV news in the morning. It's all so horrible.'

'She can't die,' says Alice. 'All those photographs.'

She's no longer listening to her friend when the latter says goodnight because it's late and they should both try and get some sleep. Although that, as both agree, will be very difficult. She looks at the sofa, at the blank sheets of paper, at the empty glass of ginger ale.

'Princesses don't die after midnight,' she says faintly, 'what would be the point of a story that ended like that?'

She sits down again on the sofa. She no longer feels sick. Stories, even badly told ones, are always good company.

(...)

Rui Zink

(Lisbon, 1961)

RIGHTS CONTACT:

Mertin Literary Agency

Nicole Witt
info@mertin-litag.de

WWW.MERTIN-LITAG.DE

_ ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rui Zink was born in Lisbon in 1961. He holds a PhD in Portuguese Studies from the New University of Lisbon, where he co-ordinates and teaches post-graduate studies in Text Publishing.
His literary activity is wide-ranging. He combines his writing with enlightened and attentive civic intervention. He was one of the first Portuguese writers to give creative writing workshops. As well as writing fiction, plays and comic book scripts, he has written a libretto (for the opera *Os fugitivos*, 2004) and has translated others, including Saul Bellow.
He is regularly invited to work with the press and television, and was a visiting professor of Portuguese Literature in the United States (University of Michigan).
Since the publication of his first book, *Hotel lusitano* [*Lusitanian hotel*], in 1987, he has accumulated a large body of work. *Dádiva divina* [*Divine gift*] won the Portuguese Pen Club Prize in 2004, while his story *O bicho da escrita* (*The writing bug*) was shortlisted for the Pushcart Prize. He has been translated into German, Hebrew, English, Italian, Romanian and Japanese.

_ SELECTED WORKS

Fiction

O destino turístico. Lisbon: Teorema, 2008 (novel)
Rei. Lisbon: ASA, 2007 (graphic novel with António Jorge Gonçalves)
A Espera. Lisbon: Teorema, 2007 (novel – revised edition)
Anibaleitor. Lisbon: Fnac/Teorema, 2006 (short story)
A palavra mágica. Lisbon: Dom Quixote, 2005 (short stories)
O bicho da escrita. Lisbon: IPLB, 2004 (short story)
Dádiva divina. Lisbon: Dom Quixote, 2004 (novel)
Major Alverca. Lisbon: Dom Quixote, 2003 (graphic novel – with Manuel João Ramos)
Os surfistas. Lisbon: Clix/Dom Quixote, 2001 (novel)
O halo casto. Oporto: ASA, 1999 (comics with Luís Louro)
O suplente. Lisbon: Europa-América, 1999 (novel)
A espera. Lisbon: Europa-América, 1998 (novel)
A realidade agora a cores II. Lisbon: Europa-América, 1998 (short stories)
A arte suprema. Lisbon: Europa-América, 1997 (graphic novel with António Jorge Gonçalves)
Apocalipse nau. Lisbon: Europa-América, 1996 (novel)
Homens-aranhas. Lisbon: Relógio d'Água, 1994 (novel)
A realidade agora a cores. Lisbon: Signo, 1988 (short stories)
Hotel lusitano. Lisbon: Europa-América, 1987 (novel)

Drama

L'accomodamento, 2007 (a theatrical text based on a short sketch by Carlo Goldoni, put on in Venice as part of the celebrations of the birth of Goldoni three hundred years earlier)
Os fugitivos, 2004 (the libretto for José Eduardo Rocha's opera)

Children's Books

Viagens na minha terra. Lisbon: Sol/Quasi, 2008 (children's version of the classic by Almeida Garrett)
O bebé que fez uma birra. Lisbon: Dom Quixote, 2003 (with Manuel João Ramos)
O bébé que não gostava de televisão. Lisbon: Dom Quixote, 2002 (with Manuel João Ramos)
O bebé que não sabia quem era. Lisbon: Dom Quixote, 2002 (with Manuel João Ramos).

_ PRIZES

PEN Club Prize (Portugal), 2004 – for the work *Dádiva divina*
Amadora International Comics Festival Prize, 1997 – for the work *A arte suprema*

_ TRANSLATIONS

French

O destino turístico. Paris: Metailié, 2010

German

Afghanistan!, translated by Martin Amanshauser. Wien: Deuticke, 2002
Apokalüpse Nau, translated by Martin Amanshauser. Wien: Deuticke, 1999
Hotel Lusitano, translated by Martin Amanshauser. Wien: Deuticke, 1998

English

The writing bug, translated by Richard Zenith. Vermont: Hunger Mountain–VCFA journal of the arts, 2009
The boy who did not like television. San Francisco: MacAdam/Cage, 2004

Roumanian

Banca de reserve, translated by Anca Milu-Vaidesegan. Bucarest: Curtea Veche, 2009
Cititorul din pestera, translated by Micaela Ghitescu. Bucarest: Humanitas, 2008

Japanese
A espera, translated by Yukiko Kondo, 2005

Spanish
O bebé que não gostava de televisão, translated by Carolina Alvarez. Caracas: Monte Avila, 2009

Hebrew
Hotel Lusitano, translated by Ori Preuss. Tel Aviv: Xargol, 2005

Brazilian edition
Dádiva divina. São Paulo: Planeta, 2007
O reserva. São Paulo: Planeta, 2004

_ SYNOPSIS:

A man is going to spend a week in a war zone, with full board and lodging. There is a growing demand for this tourist industry, for paradises of horror. And the destination does not disappoint: there are bombs, kidnappings, attempted killings, surface-to-air missiles, mothers holding their children in their arms, executions, etc. There is even a leggy female journalist and a swimming pool full of piranhas. But this Western tourist is still not satisfied...

O DESTINO TURÍSTICO [TOURIST DESTINATION]
by Rui Zink
Teorema, 2008
224 pp.

> *My favorite piece is one I will use as a marker in life from now on. I'll quote it often to friends, make copies of parts of it for the special ones (and hopefully not get sued for violating copyright). Rui Zink's "The writing bug" is a tremendous story, about the apocalypse to which we are all witness.*
> SHEHERIAR B. SHEIKH, *NEWPAGES.COM*

> *An extremely original writer in the vast universe of contemporary Portuguese literature. Zink is an astute spectator and a lively chronicler of contemporary urban life, à la Saul Bellow.*
> HELENA VASCONCELOS, *COLÓQUIO-LETRAS*

> *Remarkable narrative ingenuity.*
> PEDRO MEXIA, *PÚBLICO*

excerpt from: O DESTINO TURÍSTICO [TOURIST DESTINATION]

translated from the Portuguese by Margaret Jull Costa

He arrived in the morning on the night flight. There were no problems at the airport. Or, rather, he was expecting more problems, but since he experienced none of those expected problems, there were no problems.

His visa was in order, his passport valid until Methusalah's next birthday. There weren't many people on the plane. Nowadays, the only people who landed there were either fools, suicides, soldiers of fortune, arms dealers or else journalists of little brain but with a great desire for glory. Nevertheless, it took a while to cross the border. A passenger with the look of an experienced traveller, possibly a businessman, murmured: Bloody bureaucrats.

And he was right. It was a known fact that the country was just a fragment, that it wasn't even a country, but a zone, a zone of death, a savage, brutal hunting ground, so what were they up to pretending to be great defenders of order? That was the impression given by that entrance to the frontier: a grandiloquent gateway, full of arabesques and curlicues, that opened onto nowhere, pretending not to know that the palace to which it was the entrance had been wiped from the face of the earth. In a way, though, the frontier was an accurate prediction of what lay ahead. Farewell, outside world. Hello, hell.

When customs officials found a semi-automatic weapon in the businessman's suitcase, he grew angry:

'What do you mean, I can't come into the country with a gun? You're joking, aren't you?'

The weary, knowing, cynical guards replied:

'Security measures, sir.'

'Security measures? That's like banning high heels from a disco!'

'Those are the rules, sir.'

'Look, I have a licence to carry a weapon. I've even got a licence to kill. You must be having me on.'

'We're just carrying out orders, sir.'

'Bloody bureaucrats!'

'That's rather uncalled for, sir.'

'Uncalled for? Why, you monkey, I'll give you unca...'

'Would you mind coming with us, sir?'

What would they do to the man when there were no witnesses? Beat him up and show him that he couldn't insult the authorities with impunity? Or simply make life uncomfortable for him and give him the boredom treatment, stick him in a locked room without even a toilet, and then put him on the first plane back to civilisation? The most likely outcome was that they would simply confiscate the gun and let him go. The country needed foreign currency, and not even a band of uniformed psychopaths would kill the goose that laid the golden eggs.

When he leaves the airport, he's greeted by a whitish light, by dust and bare earth, the dried-up remains of what had probably once been pools of mud or else craters left behind by the feet of some giant reptile. And that, while improbable, was not impossible: in the brochure they referred to the zone's picturesque history and local folklore. Apparently, there were stories (though it was hard to say how reliable they were) of the existence, a few years ago, of just such a monster. Unexplained attacks, people disappearing, mysterious footprints. True or false (or, rather, *false* or false), it made a good story. There were two theories: one, that a race of extinct dinosaurs had been resurrected by mutation, the fruit of years and years of an endless cocktail of radiation and chemicals; the other, rather more poetic, that the monster had *always* been there and had simply been hibernating for a season or so, about 65 million years, a mere nothing.

From a logical point of view, the fact that no one had confirmed the existence of these creatures was certainly not proof that they didn't exist. The same reasoning that had been applied, elsewhere, to the existence or not of weapons of mass destruction was applicable here too, or was this zone inferior to other zones? It would be a terrible injustice to make hierarchical distinctions among the world's various paradises of chaos.

Then again, life has never been fair.

He found a taxi easily enough. He didn't even haggle, on the principle that only a very stupid taxi-driver would propose a price that was much higher than that of his competitors. Not that this mattered, he had money enough. Even if you were going somewhere in order to die, you still needed money. Besides, money was for spending, especially given the continuing rise in the cost of living, unless you invested in such sure-fire things as fuel, food and nanotechnology.

Inflation was a worldwide scourge. Even normal countries were dying on their feet, and so it would be interesting to find out how much death cost here in the zone. The moralisers never tired of repeating that the zone was a microcosm in which all the usual values had been turned upside down, although they said this in resigned tones, more resigned than moralising. If life was worth little or nothing, perhaps death was worth more than it usually was. And he was prepared to pay whatever was necessary.

Two lines of tanks, one on either side of the street, 120 millimetre guns set at the diagonal (like scimitars), ensuring that the one road between the airport and the city was not taken by rebels.

'You see how our government prizes security, sir.'

It was impossible to gauge whether there was any mockery in the driver's voice.

'Yes,' the passenger said.

'Not that the nationalist rebels would do anything,' the driver went on. 'It's not in their interest.'

And he explained something that the passenger perhaps already knew, that many of the rebel gangs made their living from kidnapping foreigners. If the airport ceased to function, they would lose one of their main sources of income.

The passenger had no idea if he was in an official, regulated taxi or not. He didn't yet know what the taxis there were like, the colour, the smell, the external signs, if they had a meter or merely worked out a price per kilometre. It was likely to be a pirate taxi – a private car transformed by some enterprising individual into a taxi by a mere act of baptism. On the other hand, experience had taught him that the weaker the government, the more it tried to control everything.

'If you like, I can be your driver for the next few days. Cheap, boss, cheap. I can take you wherever you want. To see our beautiful country.'

'I'll think about it,' answered the passenger.

The driver eyed him in his rear-view mirror.

'Are you American, sir?'

'No.'

The driver fell silent and waited, as if that one question had exhausted all possibilities.

After a few moments, the passenger gave a sigh and lied:

'I'm Swiss.'

The driver seemed relieved:

'Ah, Switzerland. A beautiful country. Not that I've been there. But from what I've heard, a beautiful country. Mountains and tunnels and snow, eh? And neutral too, eh?'

The passenger agreed:

'Yes, neutral.'

The driver said approvingly:

'That's good. Neutral is good. And do you have a name, sir?'

The passenger looked out of the window. They were crossing a kind of grubby brown desert interrupted by occasional houses, mostly shacks, a few bodies walking through the void with bundles on their head, and others just standing, watching the world pass by. A shepherd, tall, thin and almost naked, crook in hand, leading his scrawny flock. And the carcases, lots of them, of what had once been vehicles. The burned-out bodywork of tanks, jeeps, SUVs, vans, ordinary

cars, even helicopters. A cemetery of carbonised metal bones, except that it seemed unlikely that any diamonds would emerge from that particular mine.

What did it matter if he told him his name. What difference did a name make in a conversation between strangers? He could simply tell the truth. On the other hand, he could continue to lie. Like that Greek hero, Ulysses. A consummate liar was our Ulysses. When the Cyclops asked him his name, he said: Nobody. And when the monster complained to his father about what the Greek had done to him – put out his one eye – and the angry god asked who had done that vile deed, the foolish ogre replied: Nobody, Papa, Nobody did it. 'Nobody' and 'Ulysses' were both good names. And what other name, apart from that Greek hero's name, could he have?

'Greg,' he lied. 'My name is Greg.'

'Guereg?'

'No, just Greg.'

'Guereg. A good name. I'm Amadu, at your service.'

'Nice to meet you, Amadu.'

'Nice to meet you, Mr Guereg. The pleasure is all mine.'

Amadu spoke English, which was good. The agency had told him that everyone spoke English there. It was like a second language, or sometimes, a third or fourth language, but they spoke English.

It seemed that poor people had a way with languages. A genetic thing perhaps. English wasn't Greg's first language either, but it shocked him, really shocked him, when no one spoke English or at least Hindi or Mandarin. There, thank God, it wasn't a problem. Some people would be sure to speak English. Thank you, God, Greg felt almost compelled to say, sukran, gracias, xie xie, vielen Dank, dhaniavaad, spassiba, djecui, samalat po, barak brigadu, for having someone in this godforsaken place who speaks English.

'Soldier of fortune, Mr Guereg?'

Amadu might not have been a great driver, but he was nothing if not persistent. Perhaps it would be worth hiring him for a few days. Like a marriage of convenience. Until death us do part.

'No.'

'Businessman?'

'No.'

Amadu had one eye on the road and the other on his passenger. The left eye was fixed on the dusty whiteness that was the world outside the car; his right eye kept watch on the rear-view mirror. He seemed to have given up, poor man, unable to guess the profession of his illustrious passenger.

No, one last try:

'UN?'

Greg decided to lift the veil on the mystery which *was* no mystery:

'Tourist.'

'Ah.' It would be no exaggeration to say that Amadu's eyes lit up.

Greg, however, didn't seem to understand that look, because he felt it necessary to repeat:

'Yes, a tourist.'

Amadu laughed, and the passenger was somewhat surprised to see that he still had all his teeth. He must be younger than he appeared. In fact, now that Greg looked at him properly, he really was much younger than he appeared. Not in his forties or even thirties, but in his twenties. Maybe even the moustache was fake. A good sign. A very good sign.

Amadu nodded, still laughing, and said:

'Tourist? Yes, I understand. Tourist. Welcome to our humble country, Guereg the tourist!'

Greg didn't know if the taxi driver – amateur or professional – had overcharged him or not. Nor did he care. He didn't know how much time he would be spending in the zone, although he hoped it wouldn't be long. He had reserved a room for a week, half-board. However, if all went well, his stay would last only two or three days. That's why he had come, because this country had a reputation (deserved, he hoped) for being a place where one didn't have to wait too long to get the particular product he was hoping for.

They were entering the city now. Battered, dilapidated, charred buildings; it was hard to tell whether they were half-built or half-destroyed. Many had no roof, others only half a roof, still others were mere ruins or else bare structures, nothing but concrete and steel, and the occasional brick building. The streets were nothing but dust, with rubbish and plastic cluttering the ground and the air.

And all around a blinding light. The expression 'blinding light' should be a paradox, but it wasn't, not there. Far from helping you to see, the light was so bright you could hardly see anything.

During the journey, Greg could make out (rather than see) a few squares, a few shops, some people wandering the streets. Here and there, in a black crater, he thought he could recognise the ghost of a café or a pizzeria, even though it was besmeared with soot, a sudden blackness in violent contrast with the whiteness of the light. Besmeared or besmirched? Let the devil come and decide.

What was he saying? The devil didn't have to come, he was already there. The devil was, if not the owner, certainly an inhabitant *honoris causa* of the zone. That was the reason (precisely because it was a hell) that Greg had chosen that place, what remained of it, because the devil of that former paradise had made his home there.

Let's be clear. Greg had come there to die. And filled by a sense of euphoria, he almost offered a toast: he had a feeling in his bones, an intuition, a hunch, he felt that he had chosen the right scaramouche, scaramouche, will you do the fandango, for me, for me, for me?

After living life more or less on a God-will-provide basis, only to end up with the brutal knowledge that God had signally failed to provide, his death would at least have some sense, because he had sought it out, pursued it, had been the one to choose the place, if not the hour, for his last (or first - opinions on this differed) meeting with the creator – or creatoress.

The hotel had a swimming pool. Greg didn't know whether to laugh or cry. The hotel had a swimming pool.

Even though the rooms weren't all occupied, there was still quite a racket in the reception area. A lot of businessmen, some looking overburdened with work, were talking on their mobile phones or sitting on the sofas, leaning earnestly forwards, embroiled in some passionate discussion. A man with his hair slicked back, as if with brilliantine, was waving his hands around a lot. A tall woman, wearing a khaki waistcoat with a lot of pockets, and a pair of high boots, somewhat reminiscent of Lara Croft (the actress in the films, not the one in the video game), was issuing instructions to a hairy man with a camera resting on his knees. A group of Filipinos were following what appeared to be a local woman (pretty in her way) who was holding aloft a circular fan, like a traffic policeman. Now there were Filipinos everywhere. Always in a group – worse than the Japanese.

Amadu was unable to help Greg carry his suitcase, for which he apologised; unfortunately, taxi drivers were not allowed into the hotel. There had been a few problems some time back, perhaps Mr Guereg had heard about it. Apparently, the management thought that it damaged a hotel's reputation for their guests to be blown up in the foyer. It wasn't so much inconvenient as inelegant. After all, that was what the zone outside was for, wasn't it? The hotel foyer was a place for relaxation and repose, as safe and sophisticated, given the circumstances, as was humanly possible.

Greg kept Amadu's card, but made no firm arrangements. He would see what transpired. A porter accompanied him to reception, where he gave his name, showed his passport, and left his credit card details. Greg assumed that, as usual, this was so that they could charge him later for anything taken from the minibar or for any telephone calls, or even for using the gym, but the receptionist peered at him over the top of his glasses as a librarian might look at a reader who was late returning a book.

'We thought you knew. We charge a week in advance for any expenses incurred for hospital treatment, emergency transport, personal services, detox, prosthesis, casino bills...'

'In advance?'

A slight, almost imperceptible grimace appeared on the receptionist's face, which could have meant (a) that he deeply regretted this state of affairs or (b) that he regretted the guest was so slow on the uptake.

‘As I’m sure you know, sir, no one can get insurance to visit the zone. That is why, much to our regret, we have no option but to charge in advance.’

‘Oh, so you charge for services I haven’t even had…’

‘But you can be sure that, at the end of your stay, if the balance is in your favour, it will be our pleasure - although it is, alas, a rather rare pleasure - to reimburse the difference.’

Greg thought it best to let the matter drop. Why get into a fight he couldn’t win?

‘Fine. If those are the house rules…’

‘And the good news is that access to the swimming pool and the Turkish bath is free. If you’ve forgotten anything, bathing trunks or tennis shoes or swimming goggles or any other piece of sports equipment, we will be happy to provide you with them for a modest charge.’

‘You’re not telling me there’s a tennis court in the hotel?’

‘I’m pleased to say that there is. Naturally, the use of the courts depends on the waiting list or on the need to sweep up any bits of mortar shell, but that’s relatively rare now.’

‘Your hotel is full of surprises.’

‘Pleasant ones we hope, sir. We may not be the largest hotel in the zone, and we’re certainly not the oldest, but we try to provide our worthy guests with the best possible service. We live by the motto: the zone might be Barbary, but we are an oasis of civilisation.’

Greg was intending to take a stroll around the area as soon as he had unpacked his case. He lay down on the bed to rest for a minute, but found himself admiring the high old ceiling, which was impressive both for its height and for the relief arabesques, motifs drawn from the plant or perhaps the marine world, fish or eels, eels being halfway between snakes and fish, with the difference, in relation to snakes, that they were less disgusting to eat. Sea creatures coiled about each other in a circular movement that went (in a spiral? like a Rorschach ink blot?) from the candelabra in the middle to the four corners of the ceiling…

When he woke, he felt slightly irritated, as happens when a person’s sleep patterns are disturbed. He shouldn’t, he realised, have underestimated the effects of jet lag and, then, when he felt for the light switch, he almost knocked over the bedside lamp.

He hadn’t dreamed at all; at least, when he woke up, he had no memory of having dreamed, which, to all intents and purposes, came to the same thing. So he hadn’t dreamed.

He tried to turn on the light – nothing happened. He got up and flicked all the other switches too, even in the bathroom. Nothing. He lay down again on the bed, feeling a headache coming on. After a long moment, he remembered that the receptionist had warned him that

there might be power cuts. He had even told him where to find the matches. Of course. In the chest of drawers.

Greg discovered that there were candleholders on the walls complete with candles, rather like the torches you get in medieval castles in films about medieval castles. It was the same in the bathroom. The power cuts must be a daily irritant.

Bent over the sink, he splashed his face with water and didn't like what he saw in the mirror: a full, rather plump face, its brown eyes already dull, and with suspicious marks on its somewhat flaccid cheeks – liver spots probably. The face of a man who was already more on that side than this in the balance of human time.

He opened the curtains. Everything lay in darkness. It was still night. He was about to go back to bed in order to try and sleep when an orange flare lit up the sky, followed by another and another. It was hard to tell how far away it was, although it clearly wasn't very close, because had there been any noise of bombardments, it would have been muffled by the double glazing. Hm. Interesting.

His good mood restored, Greg lay down. Contrary to his expectations, he soon fell asleep again.

This time he did dream. He dreamed about an enormous dinosaur, possibly a tyrannosaurus, grinning broadly, with a flattering, reptilian smile; it had vast back legs, pure muscle, that contrasted with its comically feeble front legs, with which the tyrannosaurus was doing...crochet! Crocheting with the bones of its victims? Making a pair of bone bootees for a baby that was on the way?

It was the very definition of a restoring dream.

By the second day, he was beginning to get acclimatised. He still couldn't make out the names of the streets, most of which, as far as he could see, were more like goat tracks than streets, and used by shepherds with goats and sheep and by carts drawn by donkeys or mules. A woman had walked past him only minutes before, barefoot, carrying her child in her arms, its head and arms hanging limply, and leaving a trail of blood on the ground. Where was she going? Was there a hospital nearby? Why didn't anyone help her? Was it normal for a woman to walk down the street holding her dying child, so normal that no one offered to help? And who was there to take her to hospital? The few cars on the streets must have other things to do than go out of their way for someone else. Petrol was expensive. And, of course, only those involved in the war would have access to it.

Besides, memorising street names would take up a time and a will he no longer felt he had; yes, he was lacking in both items, time and/or will. However, he felt that he could safely explore the streets within a radius of five blocks from the hotel without getting lost. If, that is, they would

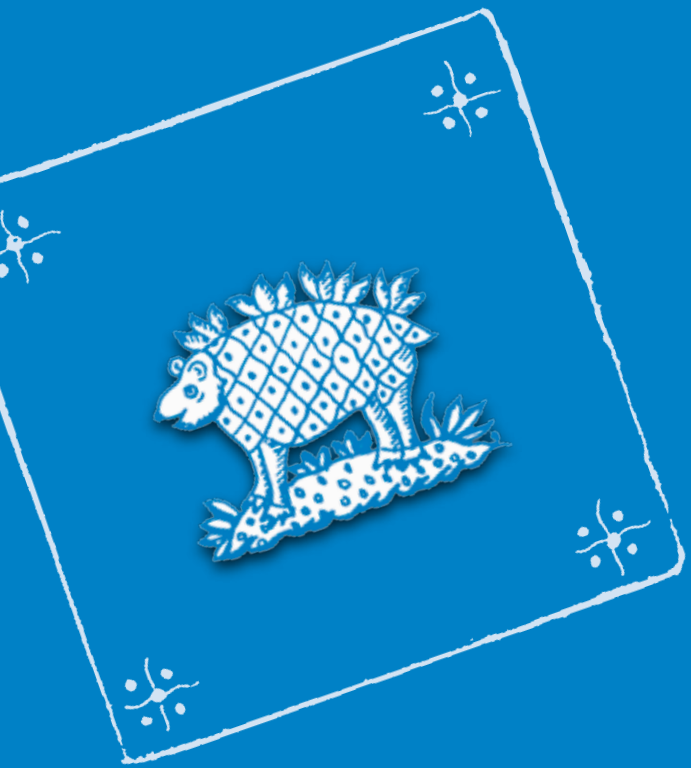
leave him alone. They wouldn't. His short morning walk was taken under escort from the hotel security guards. He tried to shoo them away, but to no avail: 'Those are our orders, sir.'

Even this failed to dent his good humour. On an impulse, he took his mobile out of his pocket, checked that there was a signal – there was – and phoned his wife. The answer machine responded, of course, but he spoke to it as if he were speaking to her:

'It's really nice here. Yes, you're right. It is dirty and chaotic, but even the dirt and the chaos are nice. A little while ago, a woman walked past me holding her child in her arms. It looked like the child had been hit by a cluster bomb, you know, those bombs that explode before they hit the ground and which don't kill, but maim.'

The signal died. He didn't try to phone again, even though he felt like talking, with an enthusiasm that was only partly feigned. He imagined the rest of the conversation: Did she understand the beauty of the cluster bomb concept? Yes, exactly, to do as much damage as possible to human flesh, by spraying out thousands of nails, an instantaneous zap-zap-zapping. Like a harpooner, not of whales, but of sardines, who, when he throws his harpoon (it doesn't matter in which direction), releases a thousand mini-harpoons, each going off in search of its sardine or its baby. Anyway, I'd better go. Lots of love. Yes, I'll wrap up warm, don't you worry.

(...)



poetry

Daniel Jonas
Manuel de Freitas

Daniel Jonas

(Oporto, 1973)

RIGHTS CONTACT:

Livros Cotovia

André Jorge
info@livroscotovia.pt

WWW.LIVROSCOTOVIA.PT

_ ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Daniel Jonas' 'irruption' onto the Portuguese literary scene was delayed by the fact that his first two books were published by small presses, so that the 'revelation' of his work only occurred with the publication of *Os fantasmas inquilinos* [Tenant ghosts] in 2005. Although this fact might not have done justice to the quality of *Moça formosa, lençóis de veludo* [Beautiful girl, velvet sheets], on the other hand it allowed the author to present himself to the public with a body of work, even if his poetry is not particularly compatible with the general drift of recent Portuguese poetry, and has caused some surprise and resistance. The de-familiarizing sense of his poetry starts with his name, which reminds us of the prophet and (something the poet seems to have sought out) chimes with the theological resonances of gods – not at all Catholic – apparently arising from the universe of Milton and Blake – or, where they are Roman and Greek, seeming to be filtered by those English poets.
Jonas is in the lineage of poets for whom the poetic word 'lends unlikeness / to the common usage' ('ut lingua poiesis', from *Moça formosa, lençóis de veludo / Beautiful girl, velvet sheets*). He

returns to this question again and again, always with his rare mastery of theory, in poems like 'Tenant ghosts' from the collection of the same name, in which it is said of reality that 'The idea is to deform it, after an interval / of time, and to pass to generalize / or, like an escape capsule, to deform / what was uttered, speech (...)'. So there is no illusion of mimesis, no desire for the programmatic avoidance of the sublime that the majority of Portuguese poets have shown in recent decades. Instead there is a diction in which the epic seems to co-exist parodically with the experience of disillusionment, as is the case of 'I am so sad that not even a Punic war would lift my spirits' in his second book. In addition, the *envoi* often adds a layer of literary memory over current diction which proves an extremely productive choice. We are reminded of the poet Camões in this appeal to his watch in *Moça formosa, lençóis de veludo* [Beautiful girl, velvet sheets]: 'Get going, my watch, make haste. / Why do you dawdle in this bed of hours / when in the other bed of her delays / absence makes me late and down-spirited?'

The de-familiarization of this poetry extends over a vast chromatic spectrum, tending often towards saturation point, in moments when the Romantic visions (always rare in Portuguese poetry) hypertrophy in a revisiting of Gothic themes, often as self-parody.

The notable self-control with which the poet navigates the high-poetic, visionary tradition reveals what a 'monster' of poetry technique Daniel Jonas is – probably the most impressive master of forms and meters in contemporary Portuguese poetry. We are dealing with a rhetorical art for which the practice of translation has clearly been beneficial; in addition, it is a poetry that intermediates between languages (above all, Portuguese and English), between forms and between images, as if Jonas really lived in the belly of the whale of Western poetry. From this point of view, *Sonótono* [Somnotonous] is one of the most extraordinary books of Portuguese poetry published in the past decade, amazing the reader by how the set form of the sonnet becomes the object of a treatment that, under the influence of his talent and deep reading of poetry, remodels it into unexpected new shapes.

It is easy, in a poetic culture such as that present in Portugal today, to reject or denigrate such poetry, exactly because of its merits and achievements. For in Jonas, the links are renewed between poetry and vision, poetry and culture, and poetry and versification – links broken by all those who even today are fervent advocates of the supposed revolutions of 'free verse' and of the further, posthumous episodes in a long sequence of Baudelairean flights from the sublime. The highly demanding nature of Jonas' poetry and its intransigently anti-mimetic attitude have a critical sharpness for which perhaps the best description is the 'ugly' name that people have hastily given it: 'anachronistic'. Indeed, in the sense in which we are dealing with a poetry that does not want to be of its time, and which inhabits all poetry's eras, this poetry has a temporal and aesthetic profundity which cannot be read without recourse to the notion of 'late style': a style that shows us, as Adorno would say, that the truth of harmony is in dissonance. A dissonance present in all Jonas' poems, even when they are rhetorically perfect (and for good reason), but above all it is a dissonance that his poetry has won in the face of the harmony of ruling consensus, just by being what it is: an absolutely singular presence in Portuguese poetry today, because it is *non-contemporary*.

OSVALDO SILVESTRE
(TRANSLATED FROM THE PORTUGUESE BY STEFAN TOBLER)

_ SELECTED WORKS

Poetry

Sonótono. Lisbon: Livros Cotovia, 2007
Os fantasmas inquilinos. Lisbon: Livros Cotovia, 2005
Moça formosa, lençóis de veludo. Oporto: Cadernos do Campo Alegre/FCD, 2002
O corpo está com o Rei. Oporto: AEFLUP/CGD, 1997

Drama

Nenhures. Lisbon: Livros Cotovia, 2008

_ PRIZES

PEN Club Prize for Poetry, 2008 for the work *Sonótono*

OS FANTASMAS INQUILINOS
[TENANT GHOSTS]
by Daniel Jonas
Livros Cotovia, 2005
112 pp.

from: OS FANTASMAS INQUILINOS

translated from the Portuguese by Ana Hudson

Probably in another time, in other circumstances
we would reach similar results
so there's no use imagining an almagest
or tables of parallaxes for this
that we conventionally call love,
nor should we engage in the calculation of the angle
between us and the centre of the earth,
for we would gain nothing, you and I,
dejected centres of irregular gravitation.

But this hasn't prevented me from seeing the Pleiades
every time I saw you (only
I didn't tell you), the Pleiades lighting up
my Hades
with its flashing little goats
grazing
in the valley of the shadow of death.

And now the question is: *who's gonna drive you home tonight?*
when the gloomy radio
keeps distilling some other questions, but none
as hard as the one

like: why does water tend
to rise inside narrow tubes
unlike quicksilver?
This is *view-master* and things I do
in your absence.

The electric lights, it may well be that the electric lights
will prevent the Autumn fall
and the bird call at the window,
grey as an overcoat.

The jaw squeezes a verb
and no bird appears,
nothing happens: it's the autumn
of the falling leaves, that's all –
no verb can thus fall.

Only the bent,
welded, muffled, cold sound
of a tolling bell,

it may well be that the electric lights
and the stone blocks for example
may well prevent
the irregularity of pavements or the crushing
of hours against each other

it may well be that the shells
of the umbrellas that blur the city
may well draw your name
like in a musical

it may well be that the shops will stay
and the stone slabs will go
and it may well not be
that the rain will insist
in such an iniquitous way.

A *saison* in hell

Everything is brief: a god,
plankton, iron.

My poem is pitiable
compared to your name
on the poster.

The voraciousness of the big studios,
the workers leaving the factories,
the great depression
of the thirties:

I drink
because if I don't
I can't drive
this body home.

Resistance to theory

I'll be waiting for the grapes
of my vineyards
to ripen
in the luminousness of the word
day

Ariadne

Judas. An entomologist
pierces more gently those
he says he loves.

Only you burly beetle,
armoured car, wag your tongs
over the crushed male.

Can terrorists be Hegelian?
You don't gas a Jew
in a tabernacle!

Take then your thirty dinars,
keep the change:
hold on to your shift
hypocritical reader.

Tarantulas' dirty dealings.
The average is ten males
for each female (if we trust
the three year relationship crisis):

she'll open for you the fig tree
only to suffocate you in her industrial
gas, oh, avoid the fig tree,
my equal, you'll die, you'll die
in her long passages,
for she's a soul constrictor,

the mermaid's apnea,
Nausiacaa's nausea,
a fuhrer if you excite
her nerves.

In her cave
a crowd of echoes
will deafen you.
Ecce homo:

he holds her web upon his head
and he bleeds, oh, how he bleeds,
from severe disciplining.

Can there be more different things
than sickness and evilness?
How shocked I was as Hume confused the two!

Dear Madam:
I examine myself
I accuse myself
I blame myself
I torture myself

I wither, I wither,
I'll let myself go,
I'd kiss the nozzle of the gas,
that's curling away already
in the anatomy museum
like a putrid ghost.

My side whiskers
sweated down my cheeks
when you were still young

and in the snow the snowman,
he goes by the name of golgotha,
check out the porosity of his cranium!
winter through to the bone –

Back to your skull, you,
evangelical scoundrel,
off with you, off!

not even foie gras comes out
of so much melancholy!
The bible denies

female fidelity , Filinto*,
from the first lauds.

But, oh, my *semblable*,
you'll die, you'll die also
inside your silence

like the tarantula who,
surprised in an ambush
by the falcon-wasp,
carelessly plunders the plunderer
and as a good courier
incubates his still living remains:

eggs which from inside
(odd ticking bombs!)
will erupt out of the pouch.

* Filinto Elísio was the literary name of the 18th century Portuguese neo-classicist poet, Fr Francisco Manuel do Nascimento (1734-1819).

My poem had a nervous.
It cannot bear words any longer.
It tells the words: words
go thither,
to another poem
where thou can live.

This sort of thing can happen to my poem
from time to time.
I can picture it: spread all over
the white linen bed
without prospect or desire

locked into silence
pale
like a chlorotic poem.

I ask: can I do anything for thee?
but it just stares at me;
it sits there looking empty eyed
dry mouthed.

Grotto

I don't want anything bright or Hellenic.
I prefer commercial airplane turbines, their
domestic soot
to the alabaster sail of Ulysses' ship
on the high seas.
I prefer an eclipse to Calypso.
I don't want anything truly white.
I dismiss the herons' delta wing,
its aero-dynamic flight,
I swap it for the scurrying of sewage rats,
their Chinese rush,
their post-traumatic stress: 17
I'm proud of such clean creatures.
I also refuse the white page:
I undertake its disfiguration
with black blood, as a white man
is disfigured in Harlem.
I will not start to imagine how slaves
might have felt in the cotton fields.

Gods don't work.
Saying my Lords will not fool them.
Lingering over a whitewashed wall

no lament grows whiter,
nor if I run through woods, tangled
in distress Diana
would you come to me.

Like a daft deer
I just entangle my own antlers
in some foreign leafy branches
and well warned 19
I still take the chalice.

I don't know why I keep seeking a god:
in the woods I look for a god
as if for berries.

Ducks

The ducks cruising on
Mandelstam's poems,
again: the ducks skating on
Mandelstam's poems
visited me today as if
this lake of mine were
sunny and clean.

And I, so unworthy of hosting
such pure creatures, so white,
tried to seize the reason why
such pure creatures, so white,
would want to come at all
to this pitch black
atoll.

The blackbird
(unpublished)

Through the night
surreptitious
the blackbird nearly
escaped but for its beak too eager
for the sun
betraying it to my distracted
search.

Manuel de Freitas

(Lisbon, 1972)

RIGHTS CONTACT:

Manuel de Freitas
nigredo@hotmail.com

_ ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Manuel de Freitas was born in 1972 and has lived in Lisbon since 1990, where he took a degree in Modern Languages and Literatures, majoring in Portuguese and French. He made his debut as poet in 2000, with *Todos contentes e eu também*, and since then has published eighteen further books of poems and chapbooks, a number of essays on contemporary Portuguese poetry, as well as an anthology provocatively entitled *Poetas sem qualidades* [Poets without qualities], in which he brings together some of the most significant names of his generation such as Rui Pires Cabral, José Miguel Silva and Ana Paula Inácio.
He is also a translator, a literary critic for the weekly *Expresso* and runs the small Lisbon publishing house, Averno, with Inês Dias, which not only publishes books by national and foreign poets, but also the most interesting Portuguese literary magazine to have appeared in a number of years: *Telhados de vidro*.
Considering the importance of his own poetry and also his activities as an essayist, critic and editor, it wouldn't be too far-fetched to predict that he will come to be considered the central figure in Portuguese poetry of the first decade of the 21st century. Freitas has been indicated as a figure who has continued the work of those poets who, during the 1970s and 80s, wanted to direct poetry back to the real and to the disillusionment of living in a world given over to market forces and to quantity. Though it is not necessarily false, this affiliation silences something distinctly new that he has brought to contemporary Portuguese poetry. What makes Freitas different is, above all else, the fact that the author feels inescapably part of this reality, which others, before him, might denounce with the vehemence of an approach that could still refuse to entirely abdicate its own exteriority.
Still more equivocal would be to see in his poetry a kind of new social realism. Neo-realism, the name that the movement took on in Portugal, loved the workers and the peasants and believed in glorious tomorrows. Freitas prefers the drunks of Lisbon taverns and refuses to feed the illusion of changing the world. The most that he will bring himself to admit is that "Perhaps

everything would be different / if the world had begun as well / as the Goldberg Variations." And even so, he is quick to qualify: "I don't know, I don't want to know, I have no idea." An indifference that, being real, is also a mask for rage. This "fury for life", which, the less it is mentioned, the more intensely it is felt, gives the lie to that label of nihilism, by which the poems have as well been characterized.

In his preface to *Poetas sem qualidades*, he writes: "Of a time without qualities, like the one in which we live, the least we can demand are poets without qualities." It is in this context that his poetry dispenses, in a large part, with metaphor and rhetorical ornament in favor of a risky prosaism, which Freitas knows how to balance, as though on a knife edge, on the one hand effectively avoiding prosodic blunders, and on the other repressing the temptation towards euphony, which is just as difficult.

It would seem that his is a poetry of the single theme, death, which serves as the dark backdrop to all the other subjects: music (from the Baroque to Pop and the music of Latin America), taverns, amorous encounters and evocations of childhood and early adulthood.

Freitas knows that from the beginning everything is lost but sees himself condemned to the pain of continuing to lose that which he has already lost. This is his curse, which is only softened by the ephemeral sparkle of certain brief moments of happiness, during those instants when death itself is distracted, or his attention is diverted from death.

Perhaps one could say that, besides death, or in a kind of fragile counterpoint to it, this poetry has one other true subject: the work of Bach – an indescribable absolute that rests beyond the music, if not – though miraculously part of it – beyond this world.

LUÍS MIGUEL QUEIRÓS
(TRANSLATED FROM THE PORTUGUESE BY MARTIN EARL)

_ SELECTED WORKS

Poetry

Intermezzi, Op. 25. Guimarães: Opera Omnia, 2009
Boa morte. Lisbon: author's edition, 2008
Jukebox 2. Vila Real: The Vila Real Theatre, 2008
Brynt Kobolt. Lisbon: Averno, 2008
Estádio. Lisbon: author's edition, 2008
Walkmen (with José Miguel Silva). Lisbon: & etc., 2007
Terra sem coroa. Vila Real: The Vila Real Theatre, 2007
Juros de demora. Lisbon: Assírio & Alvim, 2007
Cretcheu futebol clube. Lisbon: Assírio & Alvim, 2006
A flor dos terramotos. Lisbon: Averno, 2005
Qui passe, for my ladye. Lisbon: author's edition, 2005
Vai e vem. Lisbon: Assírio & Alvim, 2005
Aria variata. Lisbon: Alexandria, 2005
Jukebox. Vila Real: The Vila Real Theatre, 2005
O coração de sábado à noite. Lisbon: Assírio & Alvim, 2004
Juxta crucem tecum stare. Lisbon: Alexandria, 2004
Blues for Mary Jane. Lisbon: & etc., 2004
Beau séjour. Lisbon: Assírio & Alvim, 2003
Büchlein für Johann Sebastian Bach. Lisbon: Assírio & Alvim, 2003
Levadas. Lisbon: author's edition, 2002 [2nd ed. expanded, Assírio & Alvim, 2004]
[SIC]. Lisbon: Assírio & Alvim, 2002
Game over. Lisbon: & etc., 2002
BMW 244. Lisbon: author's edition, 2001
Isilda ou a nudez dos códigos de barras. Lisbon: Black Son, 2001
Os infernos artificiais. Lisbon: Frenesi, 2001
Todos contentes e eu também. Oporto: Campo das Letras, 2000

Essay

Me, myself and I: Autobiografia e imobilidade na poesia de Al Berto. Lisbon: Assírio & Alvim, 2005

Poetas sem qualidades. Lisbon: Averno, 2002

Uma espécie de crime: 'Apresentação do Rosto' de Herberto Hélder. Lisbon: & etc, 2001

A noite dos espelhos: Modelos e desvios culturais na poesia de Al Berto. Lisbon: Frenesi, 1999

_ PRIZES

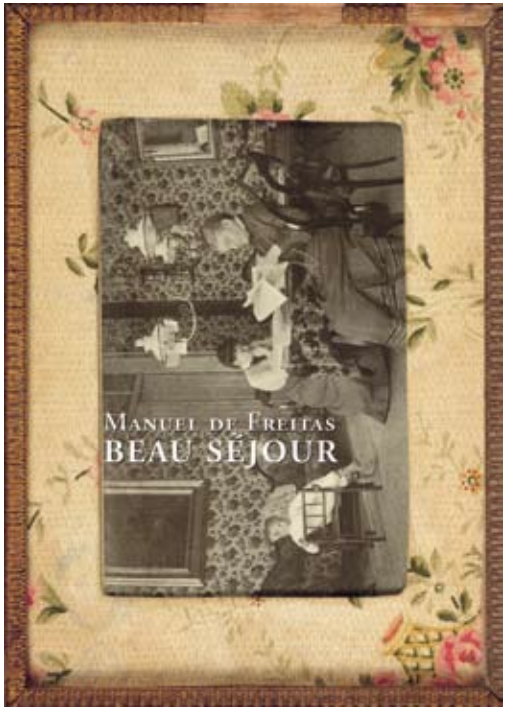
Ruy Belo Literary Prize, 2006

_ TRANSLATIONS

Spanish

El arte de la pobreza. Diez poetas portugueses Contemporâneos, translated by José Ángel Cilleruelo. Málaga: Diputación Provincial, 2007

El cielo del occidente, translated by José Ángel Cilleruelo. Madrid: Calambur, 2004.



BEAU SÉJOUR
by Manuel de Freitas
Assírio & Alvim, 2003
64 pp.

from: BEAU SÉJOUR

translated from the Portuguese by Richard Zenith

Ecce homo

I'd never woken up in a place like that – a hovel past
all imagining, near the gothic city of Santarém.
His house.
I'd met him at the Fandango
and knew only that a tearless sadness
lit up his afternoons and evenings.

This time it was different. I'd just broken
a glass in the only still open pub
(its name now expunged from my memory).
He came over and sat down, one drunk
facing another, united by the quasi-splendor
of their fall. He invited me to follow him and,
without knowing why, I followed. All the way
to the two rooms in which he lived,
without neighbors – an aluminum and plywood
shack that made the word despair
an inadequate euphemism. The dog,
at least, was glad to see us arrive.

Then he cried, over nothing. He merely wanted
a real shoulder where he could lean his head
which his wife and daughters would no longer even kiss
in a dream. He needed no words or gestures,
just an ear to hear him share the unshareable
which perhaps (I don't quite remember) he called sorrow.

He fell asleep that way, on my shoulder – and I
could have killed (but not him) for a beer
or the gin that, a few hours earlier, dropped too soon
to the floor. In the morning, when I woke up, I gently
shook him and said I really had to go. He kissed
my hand, thanking me with his rotted smile
for that nothing at all between two men
who won't ever see each other again. Outside,
a muffled light advised against any
lyrical attempt, dying among the cabbages
and junk that made his solitude less solitary.

I didn't recognize the city: dingy, dull, shoddy.
I shivered with cold and sleepiness while boarding the first
bus and almost believed – for a few hours –
that there was someone, after all, even sadder than me.

Grimy bits of vinyl

It must have been the most-played record:
the Fifth Symphony, conducted
by Klemperer. The mornings
and afternoons promised a better
future, virtuous habits,
which I soon forgot. I was already eyeing
Ana's tavern,
which filled my bedroom window.
I feared the shadows, silence,
feeling in each footstep the monster
inside me. And I read, so as not to think,
discredited French writers.

I loved it so much that one day
I grabbed the record and broke it
to bits – tiny bits of vinyl –
so that they'd hurt even more.
I'm not sure why, but I kept
the stiff cardboard jacket,
that lugubrious allegory of childhood.
And the remains of the record ended up
in the stream next to my parents' house.

Later on the stream, flanked by weekend
vegetable patches, was strangled by an implacable
housing development, the provincial version
of a gated condominium, in a world
with ever more doors.
As for Beethoven, buried like the frogs
by invisible killing hands,
he almost ceased to move me.

What moves me now, years
later, is to realize I did to that record
the same thing I do over and over
to the bodies I think I love:

I shatter them, very slowly, so that
they'll keep on hurting a little more.

Heiliger tod

It's not an artistic photograph.
If it were, I wouldn't talk about it.
It's me next to my grandfather.
I look happy and so does he,
both of us smiling, together beneath
a bougainvillea. His happiness,
simple enough, is that of a grandfather
with an old felt hat just sitting there.
My happiness is holding
in my hand a box of Nazi soldiers
who either killed or were killed,
obeying an innocent decision.

Do toy soldiers still exist?
Nowadays, children the same age
as me in that photograph
tote guns and kill
just like that, with no intermediaries,
no pretending, no playful insinuations.
Perhaps they're right, I don't know.
They're surely more effective:
they kill instead of wanting to kill.
And we've always known that this arsenal
of dung called humanity is beautiful.

No one in the photograph has survived.

from: O CORAÇÃO DE SÁBADO À NOITE

All stripped down

Older man, bald and ungainly,
seeks someone to screw who can put up with him
and believes (occasionally) in the resurrection.

Has never read books, spits a lot
and snores. Serious matter: not to die alone.

from: A FLOR DOS TERRAMOTOS

Becherovka

Norwegian, tall, dubiously
dark-haired and forever smiling.
She begged me not to be
sad, as truly I was.
And I think she paid for my last drink
before asking me "what I do".

Writing, about death, isn't
exactly a profession.
But that's what I answered,
while on some napkin or other
I summed up, just for her, my "work".

I'll never know if she made out what I scrawled,
if she bought my books, if she heard
what in my dreadful French I tried
to tell her that night, hopelessly lost.

Nearly every poem is this: an inexcusable
way of saying we didn't touch
the body that for once in our life was so close
and that didn't even leave us a fleeting name.

Pompe inutili

for Silvina Rodrigues Lopes

Nobody's born; it would make no sense
to call the placental remains
enveloping a bunch of organs
whose action is all but predetermined
somebody.

Only the dead truly
exist. They wrote or didn't
write books, love letters,
diaries. No matter: they crossed
our paths, sometimes sat
at the same table, and even believed
in the sweet torture of love.
They had real hands when they touched
the pubescent face they were saying farewell to.
A kiss, though it kissed only wrinkles,
was able to make the mornings less cold.

The dead aren't very good at farewells,
even if they're precise and sincere
as never before in the moment they descend
into the earth and won't let us
partake with them a cigarette,
one last drink, a species of destiny.

The dead are frightfully real.
A whole life is insufficient
for us to kill them all, one
by one, as the most basic metaphysical
hygiene would surely recommend.
And yet they give us the necessary strength
to die more and more, to endure
our rented days, these homes not quite fit
to live in. Because the truth is that other
people are merely the imperfect dead.
They, like us, are a bit too alive.

But perhaps they'll one day write
a poem like this (and it might not even be
a poem, let alone like this) which denotes,
besides the obvious influences, what we might
call a penchant for horror.
For that's what it all comes down to.

The dead know.
Knowledge is useless.
Poetry too.

from: ARIA VARIATA

Café Schiller

It was all in vain, again.
I was miles away from Amsterdam,
if you see what I mean, though I liked
the black stripes on the couches, the tarnished
metal of the lamps, the self-confident step
of the waitress who served the drinks.

Today this woman will enter
my past. I don't know her name
and don't care to know it. She smiled at me,
or I thought she smiled, while I paid
for two decafs, a sparkling water
and a Jameson that left me a bad taste, of lovelessness.
I'll ask her for my change in forgetfulness,
the short-lasting memory of the blouse that squeezed
her breasts and conferred on her back
the unrepeatable impression of a prelude.

I, who am going to die, desired you.

from: JUROS DE DEMORA

Fado menor

He got used to walking
under the plane trees, dissipating
hangovers and hazy memories.
The truth is they had little in common.

The first time they met they were
sitting on the same side
of a bar but on different ends.
She wore the most ardent
red he had ever seen,
under a brutal gray made
almost excusable by the January cold.

They didn't sleep together right away.
But he had her to thank for a trail
of happy sperm in the bed
where he died alone. Stretched out next to
Berkeley, Wittgenstein and Spinoza,
the pages of a course he didn't care for
and that at least didn't dirty his nights.

Within a few weeks they were walking
hand in hand through the garden
or along the streets near the bar.
Until the day she stopped coming.

Heart on fire, ashes everywhere
— there's no return from a red like that.

drama

José Maria Vieira Mendes

José Maria Vieira Mendes

(Lisbon, 1976)

RIGHTS CONTACT:

José Maria Vieira Mendes
zemariavieiramendes@gmail.com

_ ABOUT THE AUTHOR

José Maria Vieira Mendes was born in Lisbon in 1976. He writes and translates plays. Most of his texts (published as *Teatro*, Cotovia, 2008) were performed by Artistas Unidos and, more recently, by Teatro Praga, which he has joined as a permanent member of the company. His work has been translated into English, French, Italian, Spanish, Polish, Norwegian, Romanian, Slovak, Swedish, Turkish and German, and been performed in Germany, Sweden and the U.S.A. Amongst other prizes, he has won the Ribeiro da Fonte Prize for Emerging Writers in 2000 and the António José da Silva Prize in 2006.

In his text 'O meu papel' ('My role'), José Maria Vieira Mendes proposes a theory which can help us to organize his texts and to trace a line of meaning through all of them (one of many possible lines): 'I started to recycle. I mean that, for example, if I have a house in the play, I try to use it as four (*T1*). Or I have three actors and make them into seven characters (*Se o mundo.../ If the world ...*). Or, as in the play I'm writing now (*A minha mulher / My wife*), there are three scenes used as six. I make things go a long way.' It is a frugal aesthetics, half in seriousness and half in play, from someone whose first theatrical text, recycling Kafka, took the 'Hunger artist' as his example.
But another description of it would be that it explores the possibilities of the theatre as a specific practice. In this, it is heir to (but not the same as) the modernisms that tried to stake out the limits of each art and to work reflexively with what defined each one. This leads to a meta-theatrical investigation of space, of the relation between actor and character, and of time.
In *T1*, the four characters each have their own house, but the stage design represents them all in the same house, because in theatre all fictional spaces are normally represented in one, clearly delimited real space (the stage). Whereas in *My wife* the majority of the nine scenes in Act II start in the same way as in Act I, indicating the repetition inherent in the theatre (of which it is also said, and with reason, that it by nature cannot be

repeated). However, this is not a minimalist project of reducing theatre to empty spaces and to the essential relation between actor and spectator. It is nothing as distilled and full of certainties as that. It happens to be the case that the theatre (some theatre, most theatre) tends to have people pretending to be other people, and it tends to take place on a stage every night in more or less the same way. JMVM's plays take advantage of this, they think about this – they know a tradition and its transformations. JMVM is, as it happens, probably the contemporary Portuguese playwright who has the widest and deepest reading of contemporary theatre.

There is a prefatory note to *My wife*: 'I started to write this play after reading Strindberg's one act play *Playing with fire*.' That is not the same as saying that it is an adaptation. JMVM's texts can be clearly divided between the poles of 'originals' and 'versions' (based on Kafka, Schnitzler, Dostoyevsky, Damon Runyon, and Molière), and *My wife* belongs clearly to the first group. What is of interest here is the prolongation of reading in the act of writing, as if both are part of one breath. It is the continuation of the same thing by different means (another declination of it would be to say: translation). Just as the *Cahiers du Cinéma* critics who later made the Nouvelle Vague films wrote as film-makers before they had ever exposed a yard of film, so JMVM reads as a writer – and writes as a reader. Is there any other way?

The play results from the friction between two kinds of theatre: the Beckettian repetition mentioned above and the acidic realism drawn from Strindberg. If *T1* played with surfaces, portraying a generation that kept the ghosts of the pasts outside, *My wife* – in placing a family on the stage – makes the conflicts palpable, wakes the spectres, and weighs the characters down with a burden from which they cannot free themselves.

JMVM has experimented with various forms of permeability between his writing and his plays' rehearsals. *T1* has a prefatory note thanking the actors and director, *If the world …* was published as a book before the production's alterations, and in the plays published more recently these alterations are practically non-existent. *O Avarento* [The miser] appears to be a mix of these solutions, as the third Act is to be written during rehearsals – something that fits the formal rupture of the text itself. What is interesting is that a form such as this cut makes so much sense, to JMVM's writing (it is the influence of the wall that has been collapsing since *TI*) and also to the trajectory of the Teatro Praga group. *The miser*'s subtitle is *The last party* and the text writes this rejection of writing and of form, a playful derangement that also appears in the company's other productions. As the characters leave Harpagon's house, a melancholy settles which, if it were not ironic, could be called Chekhovian (but did not Chekhov say that he wrote comedies?).

There is little to laugh about in *Onde vamos morar* [Where will we live], the darkest of his plays. It is a kind of negative of *T1*: if in the 2003 text the house did the rounds of the various characters, now the characters change house as you might change your shirt or shoes, occupying the places (and shoes) that are being left empty. In contrast to *My wife*, the characters act, break off relationships, leave, return and change jobs, but none of these gestures saves them from stagnation. Each one is immobile, and alone to boot. Almost all the scenes are two-handers, but only one person does almost all the speaking, with practically no breaks. The play's title is the last line of the first verse of Zeca Afonso's song 'Canção do desterro' ('Song of exile'), which is also found in the play's epigraph. The song's last line changes the 'onde vamos morar' (where will we live) to 'onde vamos morrer' (where will we die). But in JMVM's career *Where will we live* is the start of something else that I will want to read. Whatever it is.

FRANCISCO FRAZÃO
(TRANSLATED FROM THE PORTUGUESE BY STEFAN TOBLER)

_ SELECTED WORKS

Teatro. Lisbon: Livros Cotovia, 2008
A minha mulher and *Onde vamos morar*. Lisbon: Artistas Unidos/Livros Cotovia, 2007
Intervalo in *Textos para a liberdade*. Lisbon: Artistas Unidos, 2006
T1 and *Se o mundo não fosse assim*. Lisbon: Artistas Unidos, Livros Cotovia, 2005
Proposta concreta in *conferência de imprensa e outras aldrabices*. Lisbon: Artistas Unidos/Livros Cotovia, 2005
Dois homens in *três peças breves*. Lisbon: Livros Cotovia, 1999

_ PRIZES

António José da Silva Luso-Brazilian Theatre Script Prize, a prize awarded jointly by Portugal's Instituto Camões and Funarte, Brazil's National Art Foundation, for *A minha mulher*, 2006
Casa da Imprensa Prize, awarded in the Theatre category. 2005.
Ribeiro da Fonte Prize for Emerging Writers, awarded by the Instituto Português das Artes do Espectáculo, 2000
ACARTE/ Maria Madalena Azeredo Perdigão Prize, awarded by the Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2000

_ TRANSLATIONS

T1
Italian (staged reading, Tramedautore Festival, Teatro Piccolo – Milan: September 2004);
English (reading, Tampere Festival, Finland: August 2005),
French (Les Solitaires Intempestifs, 2007),
Polish (*Dialog* magazine),
Romanian (an anthology of contemporary Portuguese theatre),
Norwegian (Det Apne Theater publication)
German (premiere in the Maxim Gorki Theater, Berlin: January 2007).

Intervalo [Interval]
Norwegian (International Short Text Challenge – centenary celebrations of the death of Henrik Ibsen).

A minha mulher (My wife)
English (HotINK festival, New York: February 2007 and Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh: 2009/2010)
Swedish (a Teater Oberon co-production with Dramalabbet, Stockholm: April 2007)
French (Éditions Théâtrales, public reading at the Mousson d'Été Festival: August 2008)
Slovak (public reading: October 2008)
Turkish (public reading, Istanbul: Junho 2009)
Spanish
Italian

Ana
French (public reading in Reims, Nantes e St. Nazaire; bilingual edition from Maison des Écrivains Etrangers et Traducteurs (MEET), 2009)

_ SINOPSIS

ANA

'A man on his own is nobody. Someone needs to call out to him.'
B. Brecht, A man's a man

A woman, Ana, and a man, Paulo, at home, on a day off work. He, in spite of everything, is restless, he seems scared, but does not know what of. She decides to make him a cup of tea to calm him down, but when she comes back into the room she will find another man there, one that has come from the past. And time, driving Ana, will continue to sow confusion as we progress through the three days that structure a narrative which splinters and opens. Until in the end there is just a woman on her own, calling her own name, looking for someone nearby who could justify her existence.

TEATRO
by José Maria Vieira Mendes
Livros Cotovia, 2008
407 pp.

from: ANA (1)

translated from the Portuguese by Margaret Jull Costa

'Everything they touch turns to time.'
PAVESE, *DIALOGUES WITH LEUCO*

Ana
Paulo
A man
Ana 2

All the characters are more or less the same age, apart from Ana 2, who should be half the age of the other characters.

Apart from a lamp, there is only a sofa or chairs.

FIRST DAY

Scene One

***Ana** seated. **Paulo** standing up.*

Paulo Ana. Did you hear it?
Ana Oh, not again.
Paulo Did you hear it?
Ana What?
Paulo An engine, I don't know
footsteps
didn't you hear it?
Something outside.
Ana A crowd.
A wave of people.
They're running towards us
they're going to tear down the house
it's all over
they're inside the house.
Paulo You didn't hear it, then.
Ana What's wrong with you?
Sit down. What's wrong?
Paulo You didn't hear.
Ana All I can hear
the only thing I can hear is your breathing
and your brain that never stops
that can never relax.
Can't you relax?
Not even today?
Paulo I *can* relax, but
why is it that
I can't understand
why I'm the only one who hears,
the only one who
Ana You're alone in the world.
What's wrong?
Paulo Didn't you hear it, Ana? Did you really not hear it?
Ana I didn't hear anything. What is it I should have heard?

And even if I did hear some noise outside,
what does it matter?
What's wrong with you?
Are you listening, Paulo? What's wrong?
You hear things no one else hears
you don't sleep,
you hardly eat, you sweat a lot
no, it's true
and you ask me those questions as if
why *do* you ask me those questions
why *do* you talk to me like that?
Why is it that now
Why is it
What *is* going on?
what's wrong with you?
what do you want?

Paulo Nothing.
Nothing. It's just that sometimes it feels like
sometimes you seem
I don't know
you're different, you're
I don't know
there's something you're not telling me
you seem
you're different.

Ana (*laughing*]
Do you think so?
Do you really think so? Different?

Paulo I don't know.

Ana My nose has got bigger.

Paulo You're

Ana And my boobs have too, I suppose.
To me
to me it seems the other way round
you're the one who's different.
You're incapable of just sitting down
of just sitting here with me
taking advantage of the fact that I'm not
working today
instead you keep pacing back and forth
up and down
with that look on your face, in your eyes, as if
you were afraid, frightened,
but frightened of what, what is it you're afraid
of?
You're afraid now.
No, I'm not the one who's different.
You hear noises outside, engines,
so what? It happens sometimes.
There are other people out there, not just you
and me
there are other people, so it's normal that you
should hear them.
If you listen. If you spend all day shut up in
here, listening.
If you want to hear.
But I don't.
I've got the day off work and I want to rest
I'd like simply to close my eyes with you
sitting here by my side
but, no, you have to keep asking questions and
feeling frightened,
and hearing things, and you won't sit down.

Paulo Did you hear it? Did you? Listen.

Silence.

Ana What?

Paulo Didn't you hear?
Someone outside. Didn't you hear?
There's someone outside. Hiding outside.
Didn't you hear? I'm sure I heard something.

Ana You're sure?

Paulo Yes.

Ana Go and have a look, then. Go over to the window and look out. Open the door.

Paulo No, no.
It's not worth it.
It's foggy out there. It's not worth it.
It's been foggy for a month now, more than a month of fog
you can't see a thing
you can't see anyone
it's not worth it
you can't see anything out of the window
but you can hear, yes, I can hear
engines, metal, I don't know,
footsteps, sometimes moans
can't you?
someone who spends all day
didn't you hear that?
it sounds like it's just the other side of the door
really close
why can you never hear it?
Why am I the only one who hears it?
Or are you pretending you can't hear?
You're hiding something from me. You're different.
What's wrong with you? Why are you looking at me like that?
Why is it

Ana (*getting up*)
I'm looking at you like that because I don't understand you.
I don't understand what it is that
I don't understand what's got into you
what changed.
Why don't you come and sit down here with me?

Paulo You can't hear it.

Ana Why don't you come and sit down here with me?

Paulo You can't hear it.

Ana No.

Paulo It's not the first time.
Today.
It's not the first time.
It's every day. More than once.

Ana There you go again.

Paulo Aren't you afraid? Aren't you afraid that outside
I don't know.

Ana Come over here.
Come on.

Paulo *goes over to her and* ***Ana*** *strokes his face.*

Paulo Your hand's cold. Your hand's so cold.

Ana I know. My nose is too.

Ana *presses her nose against* ***Paulo's*** *cheek.*

Ana It's freezing.
Sit down, let's sit down here together. *(She sits down.)*
Let's just sit down here together
without thinking, without listening, just sitting here together.

Paulo It's the fog, you see.
And I'm here shut up in the house every day
Waiting for you to come home every day
never knowing if you'll come home
every day waiting for the sound of the key in
the door and for you to come in
you arriving back from out there every day
I don't know where from, I don't know who
with, I don't know anything
you come from the fog, from the darkness, I
don't know where from, I don't know how
from the rain, from all that rain that I can hear
as well

Ana I swim here.

Paulo And if
I don't know
if you didn't come back
if one day, with me here inside, waiting,
the noises outside
and me here inside
and if you didn't
never again.
If you were to disappear
if one day you
afterwards, what will it be like
what will it be like
what can I
what should I
what will I do if one day you don't come back?
That's what I'm thinking about.

Ana Well, don't think about it.

Paulo And the people out there
because there's someone who spends all day
out there
someone who wants to speak to you but never
finds you but when he does
what will happen
what will happen when he finds you?
And me here
and only when you come in can I
only when I have you here near me
sitting there
only then can I rest.

Ana So why don't you rest now
now that I'm here with you
and I haven't got to go out to work or to go out
at all
I'm going to spend the whole day with you
and there's no one else
so you don't have to be afraid
it's just the fog
and the early dark, Paulo, because the days are
shorter
it's Winter, that's how it is
there's no reason why you should be afraid of
the rain
there's no reason why you should be afraid at all
when you can't see, you're more aware of
sounds, that's all
sit here with me so that we can warm up a bit
this damp gets right inside you, you somehow
never feel really dry
the wind comes in from the sea
my nose is cold and my hands
we can sit here side by side
and do the things we can't do on the days

when I'm working and I get home later and
you're waiting for me here, sweating,
and always afraid
as if it were normal
as if I might disappear
as if I might never come back
it's not normal
you should know by now that it's not normal
people don't just disappear like that
people say goodbye when they want to leave
they don't just disappear without saying a word
into the fog
that isn't how it happens.
Besides, I'm not going to disappear.
I like being with you. I like spending the days
with you.
We've spent so many days together, so many.
And we'll spend many more. The two of us,
here.
I like that.
And it's so good to be here with you today.
Come on, come and sit down here beside me.

Paulo *(sitting down)*
I'm sorry.
You're right. I'm sorry.
It's the fog and the night, that's all,
that's all it is.
I'm tired. Tired of being shut up inside here
every day
waiting for you every day
unable to find a job.
I should go out
perhaps if I went out
even just out into the street.

Ana Perhaps.

Paulo If I wasn't afraid of getting lost
if there was a place where
because it's hard to go out when I've nowhere
when there's nothing out there
you can't see anything
you can't see the sea, you can't see the street
you can't see anyone
and the impression

Ana What impression?

Paulo I don't know.

Ana You're just tired. You need to rest.
You need a cup of tea.
Would you like a cup of tea?
Would you like me to make you a cup of tea?
You need a cup of tea.
I'm going to make you a cup of tea. I fancy a
cup too.

***Ana** leaves. **Paulo** sits there alone. Silence.*

Paulo There it is again. A noise. There it is again.
(He gets up.)
Again. Or is it nothing?
Perhaps it's nothing. It's just me.
When you can't see, you're more aware of
sounds, that's all
No, there's no one out there.
It's just me out there. Just me.
There's no one else here.

*Enter a **Man** carrying a suitcase. He's wearing a winter coat.*

Man Good evening.

Paulo Who

who are you?

Man I'm a friend of your wife's.

Paulo Of my wife's? A friend?
Who are you?

Man May I sit down?

Paulo No.

Man I just dropped by.

Paulo How did you get in?

Man I'm a friend of your wife's. We're.

Paulo My wife's in the kitchen.
She's gone to make some tea.
My wife needs to rest.

Man I haven't come to see your wife. I've come to see you.

Paulo Me?

Man Yes, I've come to see you.
But there's no need to look like that.

Paulo Like what?

Man I don't know
guilty, frightened,
I don't know.
There's no need to

Paulo Who are you?

Man We've never met, but I know your wife.
We used to know each other.
That is, we know each other.
And I know you as well. Yes, I know you too.
Well, I've heard a lot about you.
We've never actually met.
Pleased to meet you. *(He holds out his hand.)*

Paulo What do you want?

Man *(sitting down)* May I sit down?

Paulo No.

Man It's cold out there. A really cold cold.
And the fog doesn't lift
day or night
it's been like this for a month now,
really persistent, eh?
You can't see a thing
you can't see your hand in front of your face.
Do you know what I miss sometimes, those sunny mornings,
don't you miss them too?
Those really bright, warm, sunny mornings.
It's been a while now
flowers on the blackberry bushes, children in the playground
the noise of a swing
going back and forth
there's none of that now.
But it's what we've got
so we'd better get used to it
to accept what we have
to accept other people regardless of who they are
the ones who are left, the ones who stay, the ones who turn up, the ones who come in.
Some people have a problem with that, don't they,
but I spend my day out in the street,
I mean,
a person gets used to it, what else can you do,
it's my job. Exteriors.
Has been for some time now. I wander about.
I spend all day in the street. And nights too sometimes. I know the street well.

The rain. The puddles.
I know every corner, every junction, every crossroads,
every obstacle, and there are a lot of those.
We know all of that.
That's why the fog
fog or no fog
doesn't make much odds to me
I never get lost
I know all the impediments, traps, difficulties
the number of steps
all the trees
plane trees, shrubs, flower beds
we never step in the flower beds
you have, though,
I know that you stepped in a flower bed once
we have it noted down somewhere
some time ago, it's true,
a long time ago, when you still used to leave the house
it must have lapsed by now
but you did step in a flower bed
I never have, not even with all this fog
and the voices and the engines
it makes you think, doesn't it
I know it makes you think
well, we've all noticed that, we have
your wife
us
we've noticed that you never stop thinking
that you're frightened, it's only normal,
I would be if I were you
because you never can tell and when you don't know the street the way I do
then things get more complicated, more difficult, it's true, you get frightened.
That's why I always say 'be careful with the flower beds'
just a piece of friendly advice
because under the flower there might be a thorn
just as under the sand there might be a scorpion
and the night conceals things too and so does the fog
even people do
even you, looking at me all frightened like that,
you're probably concealing something too
even though you never leave the house and spend all day waiting for your wife
our friend
you're probably concealing something that you're dying to show me
but can't
you know you can't, but you're dying to tell us.

Paulo Tell who? I don't understand. I don't know what you're talking about.
Why don't you leave? Why don't you leave my house?
Why don't you just get up and leave my house?
Why don't you just leave me in peace?

Man Come on. Are you or are you not dying to tell me
to describe to me
to tell us what it was like

what it is like
to tell us the story
to describe to us
to show us what you've got hidden away
inside you
I know you are. It was your wife who told me
she looked at me with those frightened eyes
she sometimes has
have you noticed
have you noticed those frightened eyes of hers
that's how she looked at us
as if asking forgiveness
our friend
have you ever seen her on her knees, your wife
she knows a few stories too
different stories
not yours
no one knows yours
you spend all day shut up in here and no one
ever hears you
if you spend all day shut up in here no one will
hear you
and it's a shame not to know your stories
but Ana can tell them
that's her name, isn't it? Ana.
Ana has told us a lot about you, a lot,
enough to write a book and then

Paulo Where *is* she?
Where *is* my wife?

Man And then she cried, poor thing
I even
well
I was moved, it's only normal
we're none of us made of stone, well, I'm not
fragility, repentance, pain, suffering
such things never fail to move me
love does as well
when it happens
I like those generalities
love and happiness
they're my weak spot really
yes, I have a weakness for generalities
time passing, life, death, things like that
being happy, following your dream, that kind
of thing
hope and love
when we're out in the street, out there
we develop a weakness for generalities
we learn to value them
we give names to things
it's important to give names to things
the days and time pass so quickly

Paulo Where's my wife?
(getting up) Ana! Ana!

Man Where are you going?
Speak more quietly. Leave your wife in peace.
She can't hear you
she's not here
and if she's not here, how can she possibly
hear you
she can't
but I can
I'm here
so leave your wife in peace and sit down
sit down here near me, we haven't finished
talking yet.

We've done all the talking up until now. And
I'm sure you have lots of things to tell me
I'm sure you have
anyone can see that you have
and I'm longing to hear what you have to say
I'm curious, really curious
I'm dying to know, I want to hear
we're waiting for you to tell us
to tell me about the footsteps and the metal,
the moans and the engines,
have you heard planes too? Sometimes you
can hear planes.
If you listen hard. Perhaps you should listen
more carefully.
And keep a closer eye on your wife as well.

Paulo Where is she? What have you done to her?

Man Because I know how it is, you know,
I know how it is to live with a woman
you can never quite trust them. Not even your
own wife. I never did. *(He gets up.)* I spend
most of my time in the street, so
I know what I'm talking about
I've seen a lot of things, I've known what it's
like to be cold
I know what I'm talking about
Feel my hands *(he places his hands on Paulo's face)*
Cold, aren't they?
Yes, cold.
Sit down. Sit down here beside me and warm
me up.
That's right, closer.
Let's see if we can warm each other up.
My nose is still cold. That's what comes of
walking about in the street.
(He touches Paulo's face with his nose.)
Freezing, eh?
Do you know what I fancy?
A nice cup of tea. That's right.
How about making me a cup of tea? *(He sits down.)*
Go on. I really fancy a cup of tea.

Lights off.