

## Berlin, *Abgrund*

Firstly, I'd like to say that it is a great pleasure to be here today. I do not speak German and my knowledge of the language is very limited, but, since my early youth, I've read a lot of German-language literature, and in particular a lot of German-language poetry. Some German-speaking poets are, moreover, decisive references for my work.

I've read the Romantics, and especially Hölderlin and Novalis, but also Rilke and Celan. Celan, in particular, is a very important poet to me. Language, history, trauma, silence and death, which, as we all know, are some of the strongest elements and tropes of his poetry, have contaminated and continue to contaminate my poetry today.

Then I would of course like to thank Harald Albrecht and Aphaia Verlag for this magnificent edition of *O vidro*. I am also grateful for the translation work of Mário Gomes, whose commitment and care in translating *O vidro* has been and is invaluable. Last but not least, I thank Nuno Carrilho, a long time friend, for his beautiful preface.

I thank the Camões Institute for its support, in particular Luísa Coelho, Reader of the Camões Institute in Berlin, and Rosa Rodrigues, Reader of the Camões Institute in Heidelberg.

Thank you all!

I would also like to say some things about my poetry.

I do not profess any aesthetics, but I believe in the power of memory because it is in it that all creative work is supplied. My poetry is thus an art of memory that knows that the origin is improbable, that everything is ultimately fiction and retrospective fiction.

The origin is unlikely, and I'm always reinventing the past. The historical past, the autobiographical past, in a permanent search for meaning and expression. That is our fate for reasons that we can only guess.

Poetry claims a creative property that predates literature. Literature is only an institution, at most, and I suspect that it is an institution already dead. In this sense, literature is a province of poetry. And my preference goes to the power of poetry which is, after all, the expressive power of language and, with it, of thought.

Poetry is the music of the mind, and in that sense it is inescapable.

That is our condition as humans, as poets, or, the same is to say, as mortals without any certainties, with the only certainty of an ending wounding our inner space, carving out our biography.

Then there is reading, all those pages read in a youth probably without time. Endless, still nights in which you read because there is nothing else you want to do. That was a long time ago.

I was a reader. I consider myself to be a reader, someone who runs after an interpellation. That's what I have done. That's what I do.

*O vidro (Glas)* is divided into two parts. The book is a diptych, but it should be read as if it were a single movement. The first part, «O vidro», is my «triumphal day», as Fernando Pessoa / Alberto Caeiro might eventually have said. *O vidro* was not written in a breath, it took me years, but every time I returned to it, it was as if the impulse that had led me during the first few verses had remained intact, unperturbed.

It is surely many things, that striving: a meditation on the autobiographical self, a lyrical achievement in a world in ruins, in a world that is already over.

Like Ted Hughes' *Crow*, it a sort of mortal rejoicing in the face of a world already gone. It seems to be, now, a meditation animated by a blind belief in something that might still come. A promise. An expectation. A song of innocence in an experienced and mortal world.

The second part is a destruction of this exercise. The glass breaks like an aquarium, the words comes back in the form of shards. It babbles endlessly. Childhood is the territory of the supreme fiction that unfolds there. «Ecolalia».

What glass is this?

Emblem of a poetry committed to matter: sand and fire modelled by human breath, fragile and corruptible promise of form and transparency that will never be realized, except for a brief moment.

The glass that is transparent. The glass that, immaculate, is invisible, like a film, like a skin. But also the glass that, fragile, can be scratched. Which is already scratched and at risk of breaking. The glass that is the most apt image that I can find of the violence of our so brief passage through life. The opaque glass of indecipherable writing, as a black slate. The glass that broke, by accident, and made us reconsider what was form, design and intention. *Le grand verre* by Duchamp. The glass that is the brief history of the accident that became our biography. The glass that is a brief history of violence as well.

My poetry has always been elliptical, contained, close to what we can not say. I imagine it like a dense, dead star, which, coldly, in its mortal rigor, absorbs all light. All the light of those who are reading it, or will read it soon. Beware!

In a sense, it is also a defence of irrationality. «Poetry must be irrational», said one of my masters, Wallace Stevens.

In short, *O vidro (Glas)* is a book that summons up the vital impossibility of accepting the destructive forces that are enacted by our biography. But prepares itself to accept. All the poetry that interests me is a hesitant meditation on the abyss, which calls to mind that beautiful German word which is *Abgrund*.

Luís Quintais, 27 of June, 2017 [in Berlin, Literaturhaus]