

Written by Glauc

Ortolano

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"It was in the '60s that a distancing between Brazilian and Portuguese poetry occurred. This came about naturally with the evolution of both societies: Brazil grew in the direction of industrialization. There was, a double rupture, social and aesthetic distancing Portugal from Brazil. Only recently there has been a re-approach."

by: [Glauc Ortolano](#)

Homeland of major poets such as Camões and Pessoa, Portugal has never ceased to produce exceptional masters. Nuno Júdice is unquestionably one of the most representative poetic voices of contemporary Portugal. His poetry is striking in its vivid imagery and precision, perhaps the reason for being selected as the first Portuguese poet to be published by the prestigious French publisher Gallimard.

At the time of this interview, Júdice was serving as director of the Instituto Camões in Paris, an efficient office responsible for disseminating lusophonic culture. What follows is an interview he graciously shared with me (originally in Portuguese), after our brief encounter at La Maison de Poésie de Nantes.

Brazil: What are some of your impressions of the tendencies Portuguese poetry has taken since Pessoa?

Nuno Júdice: Since the death of Fernando Pessoa in 1935, there have been several poetic movements in Portuguese poetry. One important aspect that conditioned this evolution was Salazar's dictatorship from the 1930s to 1974. In spite of censorship, the dominating poetry of this period was one of resistance to the regime—neo-realism—mainly in the '40s. In the '50s, a late surrealism phase surfaced along with poetry greatly influenced by other European poets like Rilke.

At this same time, Pessoa started to be recognized as a major poet of universal projection. It is then that a more formalist poetic form begins to be used, which would eventually

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lead to a more ample use of language in the following decade. This decade is the one that has formed poets like myself. This ample language found in long verses makes it possible to give the poem a narrative and descriptive character integrating both philosophical and existential reflections about being, on the same line Pessoa did with his heteronyms Alvaro de Campos and Alberto Caeiro.

Following the revolution of 1974, after a period of a certain eclipse that occurred, Portuguese poetry approached a urban and marginal life in the 1980s. By the end of the century a new generation sprouts, inspired in the quotidian and in autobiographical experiences like voyages, sex, and other human relations.

Brazil: While attending your reading, I noticed your unquestionable talent for constructing vivid images. Is it something you do consciously?

Nuno Júdice: My poetry is profoundly visual. I depart from a memory of beings or objects—a face, a body, nature, urban or familiar scenery—to compose a poem. There is something of the photographic or pictorial in the poetic image, which is mingled with a musical conscience of the language, thus creating a poem as a synthesis of several planes like the world, subjectivity, or the word itself.

Brazil: You also mentioned that contemporary Portuguese poetry has somewhat ceased its long-term dialogue with Brazilian poetry. Why and when did that happen?

Nuno Júdice: I believe it was in the '60s that this distancing between Brazilian and Portuguese poetry occurred. This fact came about naturally with the radical evolution of both societies: Brazil grew in the direction of the more industrialized and ultra-urbanized societies, more in the fashion of the United States, and thus Brazilian poetry, dominated by the concrete movement of São Paulo and led by the Campos brothers, had a limited repercussion in Portugal.

On the other hand, Portuguese poetry, looking more objectively into the Portuguese problematic in the '60s at first, and then eventually in the '70s and '80s, questioned the topic of identity and took as a reference the European model. There is, then, a double rupture, social and aesthetic, that distanced us. Only recently, since the late '90s, there has been a

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re-approach, however slow, nevertheless an approach.

Brazil: Could you say that there is a national poetry which presently maintains a dialogue with Portuguese poetry? And what about you personally?

Nuno Júdice: I don't believe we can say Portuguese poets maintain a privileged relationship with any particular national poetry. For many decades there was a continuing relationship with France, but this has been attenuated in the last two generations. The greatest reference has always been within the confines of Portuguese poetry, in particular the works of Camões and Pessoa, and nineteenth-century poets such as Antonio Nobre, Cesario Verde and Camilo Pessanha.

Spanish poetry has served as a model since the end of the last century, but on other phases the same occurred in regard to German poetry, especially the works of Hölderlin and Rilke; to English poetry with Eliot, and to American poetry with Pound. In my case, besides the abovementioned names, I should include Cavafy, Eugenio Montale and Mallarmé as the poets that influenced me the most.

Brazil: One can easily notice the tremendous support given by both the Portuguese Embassy and Camões Institute to Portuguese arts and culture. How effective do you find these efforts in helping Portuguese poets gain international acclaim?

Nuno Júdice: The support of these institutions will not add too much if there is not a high quality and creative literature to balance it. This is what has occurred with Portuguese literature mainly in the twentieth century, which has been considered a golden century due to the greatness of the writers produced then—from the recognition of Pessoa to the Nobel Prize awarded to José Saramago.

Among the factors that aided in the effective recognition of our literature abroad, I must mention the support offered by Instituto do Livro (the Portuguese Book Institute) in translating our works, and to the successful presence of Portugal, as the featured country, in the book fairs of Frankfurt in 1997 and Paris in 2000.

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Brazzil: In this era of information highways and disposable products, including books and other forms of art, what is it that you try to accomplish by writing poetry?

Nuno Júdice: I have never written poetry thinking of this planetary form of promotion the Internet occupies nowadays. Poetry is an isolated and solitary act where one faces oneself and one's own subjectivity. And it is on this plane that I create it. The publication will eventually give a different destiny to the poem, but naturally that is not part of the writer's creative project. Oftentimes I surprise myself in seeing how a poem or a book follows a certain path I could not have possibly imagined at the time the poem was written.

Brazzil: Can you define some unique aspects of your work and how this adds to the beautiful mosaic found in Portuguese literature?

Nuno Júdice: Since my first collection, A Noço de Poema, I have introduced the act of thinking the poem as making part of its own founding instant part of my poetics. This undoubtedly arrives from my readings of Poe's The Raven, translated by Pessoa and Baudelaire, and of Filosofia da Composiço, but it arrives equally at a time in which both linguistics and structuralism left their mark on my generation.

However, these "theoretical" aspects did not limit my poems to an intellectual exercise, but my relationship with life, biography, and poetic subjects have been some of the many other aspects that have come to occupy a decisive place in my universe. This act of living the poem, thus, is the other point that marks my difference in relation to pure formalism.

Brazzil: How does being from beautiful Algarve affect your work both in theme and in color?

Nuno Júdice: It is not by chance that some of the greatest poets of the second half of the last century were born in the Algarve: Gast&ao Cruz, Luiza Neto Jorge and Antonio Ramos Rosa, for instance; nor that poets like Sophia de Melo Breyner found in the Algarvian landscape a permanent source of inspiration. For me, Algarve is the link between land and sea; the variation of sky and nature's colors; the passing from summer to fall, memories of my village and the illiterate women telling stories from a long oral tradition. This

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link to the land and to a past where memories from Romans, Arabs and Jews mingle together are all part of the motors of my poetry.

Glauco Ortolano is a poet, novelist, essayist, translator, and scholar who is currently teaching Brazilian language, literature, and film in the Centre International des Langues at the University of Nantes. He welcomes comments at ortolanos@hotmail.com