

From Otto Lara Resende to Murilo Rubião

Rio, September 30, 1948.

Murilo, friend: For several days I have been about to write to you. But you cannot imagine how many complications this poor man has been through. I have been wound up, more than ever, with embarrassments all over the latitudes. Now, I am putting things away to their places, I don't have my face swollen anymore, I have paid off a debt at the Bank, got engaged, things are going on. There is still a lot to do, but let us hope in God. For all this, I have been gone. I don't write letters, a genre which I have, in another time, been dedicated to. My correspondents disappeared, nobody answers me, I scream, there is not even an echo.

You are the only loyal *Mineiro*¹, the only Christian of these mountains who strangles the souls of these cold and petty people whose hearts are stone in an ice chest. You pulse, pulse with sadness and despair, it hurts in me, you hurt in me, my old Murilo, but good. – I said the other day on the telephone, at Fernando's house, that I had received the stories and liked them. I really did. I was waiting for an opportunity to write you calmly, telling you what I think. I don't know if I can do it now, for it is already very late and I have to get up early in the morning. Now, I always go to bed before midnight, usually at 11, and get up, the latest, at eight. In general, I have nothing to do so early, so early in the morning. But I get up. I'm getting along with the new regime. I quit smoking a month ago, already, I stopped having headaches. I sleep well and I don't drink (I have never been into it, you see). Maybe it will happen all over again, but so far I am doing very well. I just have not healed from the habit of keeping wondering and getting sad and sad, slow, slowly, sweet-sweetly, until bleeding of doubts and sadness, until doubting my own existence. It was like this just today, my astrological day actually predicted contrarities to me. I'm in a deep depression, it gives me a retrograde infantilism, I feel like a baby, a boy, willing to be protected, packed, cared, out of the world, away from everything, relying on something fragile but really powerful, as of a boy's mother, or even a thing, thing-thing, a little chair noise, a table leg, a certain shadow of familiar counter. Oh, world with no shelter, cruel and cold world, stupid and silly world.

As I was saying, I don't know if I can write now what I need to tell you. I look for your two last letters, one I received yesterday. The first one communicates me about the birth of "A Estrela Vermelha", great. Great title, really good, it is a shame that it might be taken (there are still many stupid people in the planet) as in a faraway political sense, as suggestion of the color and the star. How many stories do you already have? Thank you so much for the information that I will be at the dedication, you are still a man of friends, Deo Gratias. But do not believe them too much.

– As to your transference to this metropole, I can only see it as a very good measure. Evidently, this is a problem that must fit in a personal equation, always variable according to the person, solved, therefore, individually. For me, the moving was great. (After I wrote, I wondered, almost at the same time: was it?) Moving is really good. We grab to these beaches the *mineiro* corpse and keep living in here, just like in there, but in other frames, almost always with more movement and more sun, more windows, more light. Essentially, however, if there is really an essence, it doesn't change in any way. Nor

¹A person from Minas Gerais state.

anything goes away. Nothing passes, by the way, in any way. Everything remains. Through life outside, we tie corpses to ourselves, creating monsters as snowflakes. The day to be devoured will come. We put off this devour with literary vomit. We write not to be devoured. (Someone must have said that, but it's mine). You, if you are really willing to leave Belo Hte., should try an experience in Rio. If you go to France, I believe this trip will ease everything, because it will help to unbound some ties, which are hard to disconnect. B. Horizon has an appeal. With me, at least, it was like this: I would fall in love with a little ray of sunshine, a little wind of João Pinheiro avenue, a scar on a bench at Praça da Liberdade, the dry leaves of Alagoas Street, with some initials on the sidewalk of Sergipe Street, with the peace of a certain block stretched out under the three o'clock sun, with the lazy cock-a-doodle-doo of a really *mineira* chicken. Everything is reason not to move because everything is a love reason. But we move and start to love other things, without forgetting the old ones. I'm like this, I love in a wide diameter around me. Put me in the Sahara and I will love five hundred kilometers of sand, in the purest and most ardent of passions.

Your second letter is the booklet of sadness. It worries me. My dear, reform your hat, put on cloth, don't spare it, find it an owner and make the rain. As for the absence of friends, this is it: when we really need them, they don't exist. It's not out of their ingratitude, no; maybe it's not. It's for fatality, for fate - Hard duty, this living one. I keep saying I don't feel fit for it, that I ignore it, that I don't know where to start. As for me, my true calling is death. We're really born to die, with this disguise that's the life in between. I don't know, but I don't believe in solutions. Helplessness has no cure, it has palliatives. Seek relationships, connect to things, stupidly love a broom, fall madly in love with a rug, die for a collection of stamps, be driven a fool out of love for some maidenhair fern. Forget a little, anesthetize as much as possible the feeling, the sensation, the kickstart of existence, of the experience. To leave oneself, expelled if necessary, as you expel a leper and repugnant dog, or we die from chewing our conscience, in this bitter and small self-devouring. By tendency, I'm a ruminant of myself. We need to provoke, help hemoptysis, vomit a little of our soul (and not eat the vomit, like a humiliated dog). *Estoy cansado de ser hombre*². When I'm asked how old I am, I should answer: - I am twenty-six years mistaken. There is only one way in life, the path we make up hand in hand, slowly, sluggishly, unnervingly. It is useless to seek shortcuts (illusions), we are violently replaced on our individual via crucis. And we are alone, frighteningly alone, in this ghastly march to the great show, the great play, the huge representation, the fabulous theatrical magazine that will be the doomsday.

Forgive all this inappropriate talk. If I have no hands, I'll bare unsuspecting abysses.

- I read "Not Don José" several times. Since I was there in Belo Horizonte, if I'm not mistaken when it was published in "Estado". I like the story, but almost always, when I meditate on it, I find it somewhat schematic, made of literary mosaics, small egregious. I do not have fully a certain dislike that I feed, I am not sure if rightly, by the interrogation. Not Don José is full of interrogation, of short sentences, in an elliptical style, so different from yours, which is biblical, narrative, quiet, wide. Not Don José's breath is another one, syncopated, non-rhythmic, bumpy. After all, I can't say I don't like the story, because I really do. I find in it very good things and I interpret, to myself, as a satire of human judgments. It is a story-parable about the justice of men, their judgments and evaluations.

² In free translation from Spanish, "I am tired of being a man".

Don José loved the people. Great figure, that of this false Spanish nobleman, enigmatic and ill-judged suicidal Danilo José Rodrigues. He did not miss, later, after everything was unappealable, the irony of a statue.

"The Dragons" put me back in their rhythm, lull me. From the first sentence, I have been lulled in the narrative, made in the serenity ye of normal things every day, with familiar words of their own to tell a case at lunch, and yet containing, encased in his magical reborn power, the astonishment of absurd things. We believe in the story of dragons, because it is narrated to us in a tone of verisimilitude. I don't see anything wrong with this story, nothing out of place. I suspect only that of the two dragons, Odorico and João (excellent names), one could have a different fate, the last, João, to prevent them from disappearing. Maybe it's silly, it may be that disappearance is the best, but it may suggest a small gap in the imagination. But it doesn't matter. "Only the children, who secretly played with our guests, understood that their new companions were simply dragons. To them, however, no one bothered to listen." It's terrific. It's remarkable the tone of the narrator, narrator who is of a very unwise wisdom. "They are dragons", he is the one who puts things in places, but soon falls off to the fantastic when it comes to educating the dragons, fantastic beings placed in an everyday atmosphere, absurd ingrown in the vulgar and the possible. "The Dragons" twists us from the inside, hurts, drives us crazy. I think you should not cut that claim that was instilled to João, maliciously: that of being elected mayor. I think this is very good and highlights the contours of the story, which is based exactly on this alliance of absurd and vulgar.

– "The Moon" is astonishing. It's amazing how, with three pages, you can communicate the feeling of a character's existence, Cris. Stylistically very well done. The story is airtight, hard, without handle, round, closed in itself, difficult to access, unapproachable. That's what it's written, that's what it is. In the end, murder is a beauty, with the moon rising from Cris' thin body. The crying prostitute, and then the surprising plaster smile, which lends a sudden sense, an importance previously unsuspected, to the doll seen in the window of the suburb. "A childish face with a plaster smile and blue eyes." There are no explanations, no facilities: the tale is complete, closed, unapproachable, as said. It leaves a feeling of sickness. I imagine to myself that an innocent man was murdered, but the killer was enslaved to him, to his routine, to his walks: he had to kill him to break through. He should love him, certainly, with a childish face and blue eyes. And the plaster smile, a trait that dehumanizes Cris and violently approaches him to a doll.

– "A cobra de vidro" has finds, but I haven't got along with its unit (even inside) yet. It's a dream, Marialice's return. The "Oh my Russian general!" I find a delight, just without any explanation. It is a story that requires effort from the reader. If we don't read carefully, we don't realize that the character has an unused eye, we don't connect the dots. And it's bitter (like almost all of them). I think I know what displeases me in this story: it is not exactly a short story, but an episode, a chapter (of novel, of romance). Marialice disappears too fast. The parallel trails condemning to loneliness, like this there are other finds.

– "The Red Star" is positively the best, the richest in meaning. Godofredo loves Misty (Misty is Dora, for the mother, for that who loves her is Misty, nothing prosaic name like

Dora, before poetic to be). To take it from his brother, he'll prove he's crazy. Do not cut "With a vacant, far-off stare, as if he were addressing his words to the fields, or to animals out in the pasture." I think it's really good. Og sees stars, of all colors. He's a poet, he's a lover. Not Godofredo. But he's the one who ends up being the crazy and the abnormal, the one who didn't see stars. He saw, knew about pigs. It's a beautiful story, where I meet again the Murilo Rubião from "The Ex-Magician". Godofredo would try to recover the days of childhood. After he cried at length, however, about to end the afternoon, a huge red star stands before him and gradually unfolds in color. All colors – as the story concludes, loaded with poetry, defense of poetry, meaning, connected, like others, to the biblical source.

– Old Murilo, it's too late, I can't continue in this attempt to tell you about the stories you sent me everything you would have to say. I'm tired, very tired, sleepy, with little desire to hit the machine. I'm sorry about the untidiness of this letter. It goes in it, however, the best of my interest in your literary work and the warmth of my friendship. I wrote a lot (five pages!), but I feel dissatisfied, without going the whole hog to say everything it would take. Maybe it's not right to say everything (not regarding the stories, or you, but me, my moods – let it be clear). B. Hte, how is it? Hélio (this ungrateful) sent me a poem to publish. I left O Jornal, it's been two weeks. I published two sonnets of him, without him sending them to me, I had them. I read from him again the Sonetos e Canções. I'd have a lot to say to prove I don't like it. Do you hear from Marco? Amílcar? What about the others?

Old Murilo, the usual hug.
Otto