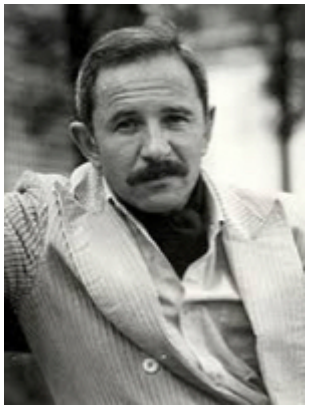
Detrez, Conrad

(1937-1985)



No one could foresee the internationalist fate and the intense "displacement" that history had in place for French-speaking Belgian writer Conrad Detrez. From a rural, Catholic background, Detrez later came to renounce his provincial origins as he crossed paths with history, first as a guerrilla during the Brazilian dictatorship, and later as a reporter in Portugal during the PREC. This "displacement" was not only physical, but also political and cultural. Indeed, Detrez arrived in Portugal in 1975, already during his break with leftist thought; a distancing he made clear in *Les noms de la tribu* (1981). Paradoxically, it was in revolutionary Lisbon, intimistically described, that he resumed the review of his provincial past, named "hallucinating autobiography."

After having published his first autofictional novel *Ludo* (1974), Conrad Detrez wrote *Les Plumes du coq* (1975) in Lisbon, a fictional evocation of adolescence. Detrez, aware of the dangers of radical militant passions, solemnly renounced his apology of armed struggle. As he later said: "Seul alors m'est devenu acceptable le socialisme démocratique".

It's not surprising that his description of revolutionary Portugal's state of affairs sounded too cautious in Northern Europe, as he made clear in his posthumously published essay, *La Mélancolie du voyeur* (1986). In it, Detrez exposes the desire to partake of a collective Lusitanian mythology composed of "saudade," departures and returns, which the Carnation Revolution and decolonization made even more patent. He confessed his adherence to the Portuguese sentiment: "La saudade, je la possède. Lisbonne me l'a donnée. Un pan de ma forteresse". Later, he stated: "La saudade m'envahit," before announcing his full affective appropriation of the Portuguese language; more of an "adoptive language" than an "adopted language."

Detrez went as far as to confess he felt envious of a Portuguese friend, Chico, a "retornado" from India already primed to once again set sail, headed for an uncertain future. In a way, the

Lusitanian “exile” of Conrad Detrez – a native of the amnesic and aseptic Belgium – offered him the opportunity to borrow a historical heritage: “Henri, prince des marins, héros de mon pote, je me rapproche. Tes nuages sont les miens: ton océan, j’y plonge. Tes caravelles, je veux y remonter”.

Similarly, Lisbon, the former imperial capital, now home to the PREC’s turmoil, was adopted as his symbolic and affective city: “D’où le nom: Olissipone, tous ces passages, ces abordages, ces voyages… Des départs sans retour également. Ville de conquérants, de découvreurs, marins, aventuriers, l’émigration qui continue: un patrimoine vivace, unique, omniprésent : la saudade.”

Also in *La mélancolie du voyeur*, Detrez admits that it is this new feeling, “saudade,” which is most attractive to him in the Portuguese reality and soul, and he wagers it will survive beyond the ongoing revolutionary process: “vague à l’âme, délices er pleurs en dedans. Tout cela (Dieu merci) resiste aux coups d’États (…)”. Thus, the Portuguese theatre of revolution arises in those “deux années d’incertitude” as a farce starring manipulated puppets: Gonçalves, Soares, Otelo, Cunhal, etc. Conrad Detrez’s internationalist fate further developed with his French naturalisation and his proximity to the socialist government after Miterrand’s victory. He would later be appointed cultural attaché to Sandinista Nicaragua, where he wrote *La Ceinture de feu* (1984).

Travels

Portugal, Belgium, Brazil, Nicaragua.

Quotations

I was born in Liège, in 1937. A second life arose and overturned the first, in 1963, in Rio de

Janeiro. In the first time, I was a villager, a Wallon, a Catholic, a French speaker. The second time, I became a dweller of the suburbs, a man of Rio de Janeiro, a speaker of Portuguese. (*Les Noms de la tribu*, p. 36) (translated)

Hence the name: Olissipone, all these passages, these attacks, these voyages… Departures with no return as well. City of conquerors, discoverers, sailors, adventurers, the emigration that goes on: an enduring, unique, omnipresent heritage: saudade. (*La Mélancolie du Voyeur*, p. 119) (translated)

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