

Quignard, Pascal

(1948)



The literary career of Pascal Quignard began in 1969 with the publication of the essay *L'Être du Balbutiement*, about Leopold von Sacher-Masoch. His first novel, *Le Lecteur*, was published in 1976, and was followed by others like *Les Tablettes de buis d'Apronemia Avitia*, *Le Salon du Wurtemberg*, *Tous les Matins du Monde*, *L'Occupation Américaine*, and *Terrasse à Rome*. The novel *Les Ombres Errantes*, the first volume of *Dernier Royaume*, won the author the Goncourt Award in 2002.

The first mark of the author's contact with Portugal can be found in the novel *Les Escaliers de Chambord*, published in 1989, in which Pascal Quignard makes a reference to the Chinese Pavilion, echoing a visit that the writer made to Lisbon for the launch of a book at the Institut Français Portugais. However, *La Frontière (The Border)* was the novel who figured the main connection between Portugal and Pascal Quignard's literary work.

At the origin of this brief fictional detour were Michel Chandeigne and Anne Lima, founders of the Chandeigne publishing house, who proposed to Quignard he write a book about the Fronteira Palace, to be published in French as well as Portuguese. Having visited the building several times, Michel Chandeigne, predicting Pascal Quignard's eventual interest in the imaginary of the 1600s, showed him several photographs, namely of the bestiary on the palace's *azulejos*. At the invitation of the marquis of Fronteira, D. Fernando de Mascarenhas, Pascal Quignard spent some days at the palace, a stay during which he wrote *La Frontière*. The book was first published in Portugal by Quetzal Editores, translated by poet Pedro Tamen, with the launch taking place during the marquis of Fronteira's party at the palace on May 19, 1992, which the author attended. The original French text was published in June of the same year by Éditions Chandeigne - Librairie Portugaise.

Although Pascal Quignard based himself on Lucius Apuleius' Latin text *The Golden Ass* for the construction of the fictional concept of *La Frontière*, the entirety of the book is closely linked

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to the *azulejos* in the gardens of the Fronteira Palace. Conversely, José Meco, author of the historical notes accompanying the illustrated edition of the book, emphasises the fact that the fictions represented in those *azulejos* have not yet been uncovered (Meco, 1992: 135). Thus, by setting the plot between 1640 and 1669, the historical period at the end of the Philippine rule, Pascal Quignard's book, besides approaching the genesis of the building of the Fronteira Palace, presents itself as an expression of the fictional dimension of the *azulejos* (Lapeyre-Desmaison, 2006: 176).

As an informative note, the name of Grezette, a character from *La Frontière*, was chosen by the author, who claims to have taken the names of his characters from reality (Lapeyre-Desmaison/Quignard, 2006: 169), this time from the label on the small bottle of wine (most likely from the Grezette wine cellars) given to him on his Paris-Lisbon flight. This fact, forgotten by Quignard himself, was later reminded to him by editor Michel Chandeigne (idem, 170).

Travels

Portugal, France.

Quotations

On a day in July, the count of Mascarenhas invited his cohorts to a party at the country house he was building far from Lisbon, on the hills and in the woods. The place was wild. The air mixed the dizzying emanations of jasmine and myrtle with the perfume of lavender, orange trees, sunflowers and roses. (*A Fronteira*, 16) (translated)

The count said he intended to concentrate in his garden the oceans, the dry land and the starts and that, once he achieved this, he would remain there. (idem, 17) (translated)

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The marquis of Fronteira kept his promise. Not a single word came out of his mouth. He commissioned *azulejos*, the painted ceramic squares, from craftsmen. Silently, he gave them some of his own drawings on India paper. Silently, the craftsmen enlarged them and set them in the kiln. They carried them to the walls and placed them there. The count said nothing. When his new house was finished, he entertained in it, as was his habit. The drawings on the *azulejos* created quite a commotion. The court flocked to the palace to see them and both enjoyed its allusions and understood their hatred. Their audacity and coarseness scandalised those who knew neither the circumstances nor the details. (idem, 79) (translated)

That is why the park is peopled with men who committed suicide and dancers who fell. That was how the marquis of Fronteira exacted revenge on the revenge of the Lady of Oeiras. That is why the animals in the *azulejos* took on human faces. That is why at the edge of the frescos, in the corner of the walls, we see crouching figures lifting their skirts and relieving themselves in the shade. (idem, 82-83) (translated)

#### Selected primary bibliography

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