

Arménio Vieira. *No Inferno*. Lisboa: Editorial Caminho, 2001.

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What do you get when you cross Dante's *Inferno* with *Robinson Crusoe*? *Romeo and Juliet*? *No Inferno* also interweaves poetry, stage drama and prose throughout.

Arménio Vieira's second novel, recently published in Portugal by Editorial Caminho, is an homage to the Western Canon. The novel contains one reference after another to classics in English, French, Spanish, and Russian—sometimes with helpful footnotes when Arménio thought it was necessary. The main character has a photographic memory and seems weighted down by the presence of all these words in his head. The words of others inhibit him from exercising his own creativity.

The work begins with a writer being forced to write a novel. The next passage—the beginning of the novel, finds the main character, Leopold, locked inside a house and forced to write a novel to obtain his release. Additionally, he has no memory of his past or how he came to be there. Leopold's name then changes to Robinson “because it was time to change the character's name.” He slowly comes to realize he is Cape Verdean through some shards of memory (shades of *A la recherche du temps perdu*), but they are presented more as facts than deep insights into the character's personality or culture.

The rest of the work is a series of dreams, short stories written by Robinson in his attempt to write himself out of captivity, chats with the Devil and ambiguous passages that could be any of the three.

We vertiginously fall deeper and deeper into the sub-texts, as Alice fell down the rabbit hole until, in the end, the structure disintegrates—leaving us wondering what the principal frame of reference really was. The book is self-referencing in that both Arménio and the writer character are trying to write a novel and the effect is not, shall we say, novelistic. Robinson, inside the writer's story, is also trying to write a novel and can only write short stories.

What is really exciting is that Arménio seems to have broken away from the undertow of the Claridade movement of the 1930s. The popular Claridade themes (drought, starvation, immigration, etc.), considered as defining Cape Verdean writers up to the current generation, are almost completely absent. Arménio takes Germano Almeida's innovation one step fur-

ther, as the plot takes place outside of Cape Verde and references to traditional themes are symbolic if at all.

The Robinson Crusoe theme and the house/prison far from civilization are indicative of the isolation of the islands and how they become a prison for many during droughts. The omnipresent explicit and implicit references to foreign literature show the influence the many sailing vessels had on Cape Verdean culture. The predominance of these references compared to Portuguese or even Cape Verdean ones is telling. Cape Verdean literature has become a literature to be reckoned with on an international level.

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