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# João de Melo

Katherine Vaz

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JOÃO DE MELO was born in 1949 on São Miguel in the Azores. After immigrating to Lisbon, he attended the Dominican Seminary and left in 1967. The combination of being a displaced islander and an urbanite with spiritual disillusion led to one of his most celebrated works: *Gente Feliz com Lágrimas* (1988), (“A Happy People with Tears” and also “A People Happy (Content) with Tears.”) This novel exploded him onto the literary scene by winning a parcel of national and international awards. Translated into numerous languages, the novel continues into its twenty-sixth edition in Portugal.

His experiences in the medical corps during the African Wars have also figured in his work, which includes eight novels, essays, and travel-writing. His vehemence in taking on institutions is matched by the strength of his imagery. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in his masterpiece, *O Meu Mundo Não É Deste Reino*, (*My World Is Not of the Kingdom*), translated by Gregory Rabassa, who also translated *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and declared that *O Meu Mundo* was the most remarkable novel he had read since the Gabriel Garcia Marquez classic.

The novel is set in the mythical town of Rozário in the Azores. The following passage is an unsparing portrayal of how poverty can collapse the world, combining unabashed realism—digging up the dog—with truth so blatant we’d prefer to call it hallucinatory. We are left with this unsettling question: What if we read the shocking ending not as a metaphor, with a metaphor’s comforting distance, but as real fact?