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Ribbons, 2004
Oil on Canvas, 66 x 72 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

JOÃO MELO

Portrait of a Character in Search of a Writer

You lot need to know my history. Yes, with an H. Do you think it might be of interest to some author?

Well, here it is.

I never had a childhood. At least I don't remember one, which amounts to the same thing. When I say this, what I'm really saying is that I cannot remember anything. Zero. Absolutely nothing. I don't know when I was lifted out of my helpless vegetative state for the first time, or when I started crawling. I have no clue as to which direction I took with my first steps. I don't know which word was the first one to find its way out of my mouth.

To dramatize a little bit more, I also have no recollection of the first time I used a potty, brushed my teeth, or ate with a knife and fork. I don't even remember the first time my penis hardened, or what caused it to—something which bothers me to this very day.

Of course, I am aware that this elementary information is passed on secondhand for everyone—in other words, by a third party. But I haven't even had that.

Indeed, to cut a long story short, I never had anyone to tell me what that first period of my life was like, on this planet on which I happen to live. Likewise, I never had anybody in whose steps I could follow, whose light could be my candle in the midst of the awful gloom that, for me, is human existence; or whose outlook could act as

some sort of white flag, flying peacefully but decisively in the center of this constant war, all against all, every day, without exception. (Please note, regarding the preceding description, the abusive intrusion of poetry, which, allegedly and according to a few heartless critics, merely muddles the story.)

The earliest memory I have of myself is of someone suspended on two apparently solid legs, but with a completely hollow mind and with a worrying feeling of loneliness and fragility, without knowing what to do or which path to follow. Instead of being appeased or diluted, this sensation has only increased over time.

Since I have known myself as a person, a kind of paralysis has kept me restrained in the shadowy heart of time. I feel tremendously overloaded by all the individual and collective dramas and tragedies of the world. It is as if my shoulders have had to support the entire weight of the terrestrial globe.

I feel permanently harassed by a powerful and complex impulse to do a number of things simultaneously, but the truth is that I do absolutely nothing at all. I don't even have a clearly defined profession.

It is true that I have a diploma, but I don't know what to do with it.

I also don't know how I got it. I do not recall having attended any school, college, or university.

Everybody remembers, for example, their first primary school teacher. Normally, she's the object of all sorts of descriptions and impressionistic accounts, nearly always generous and kind ones, but even when there isn't much ground for that, the students are at least lenient.

In my case, however, my first teacher is a vast black hole. Years ago, I gave up trying to bring her to mind.

Likewise, I don't remember a single school friend.

I don't remember a single crush, either platonic or consummated, during childhood, adolescence, or even during my adult life.

Petty sociology—a very useful tool, so it seems, for contemporary writers—says that teenagers are usually sexually initiated by their cousins, their domestic workers, or by the old spinsters who frequently visit their homes.

The truth is that I cannot recall having peeped at any cousin bathing in the shower or getting dressed in her bedroom alone, in front of the mirror, oddly fascinated by