



# 1968 (and afterwards)

## Depictions of youth in the novels *Heißer Sommer* and *Sem Tecto, entre Ruínas*

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### ABSTRACT

1968 is the historical and cultural timeframe of the German novel *Heißer Sommer* [Hot Summer] (1974), by Uwe Timm, and *Sem Tecto, entre Ruínas* [Without ceiling, among ruins] (1979), written by the Portuguese author Augusto Abelaira.

This is the year of the student protests in the Federal Republic of Germany and of Salazar's fall, which raised the expectation of a new political beginning in Portugal. Both novels refer to the year of 1968 as a historical milestone, as the *annus mirabilis* for transnational youth emancipation.

In my master thesis I closely inspected from a comparative standpoint the political activism of youngsters during the «roaring sixties», their urge for sexual liberation and the gap dividing their own generation from that of their parents.

1968 burst with a challenge to the conventional set of values. This outburst was led by the younger generation, determined to break the boundaries of the establishment and to share ideas and ideals in an unprecedented transnational convergence. Through sit-ins, public discussion fora, mass demonstrations, barricades at the universities and red carnations in their hands, the younger generation tried everything to make their outrage heard.



Fig 3. Student demonstration in Munich, 1968.  
Uwe Timm is the fourth activist counting from the left.

In *Heißer Sommer* and *Sem Tecto, entre Ruínas*, History intertwines with fiction. Both novels seek to recapture the socio-political environment of tumult that was experienced in '68, and to recreate a unique generation gap, marked by the conflict between two worlds: the old and the new, the already instated and the one the youngsters wanted to build. Despite cultural and political differences between the Federal Republic of Germany and Portugal by the end of the Sixties, the utopia of transformation connects the two novels.



Fig 4. "Under the academic gowns, the mould of one thousand years": Student motto in West Germany

Fig 5. "We want the liberation of our fellow students; youth does not fear the politics of fear": Student motto in Portugal



Fig 6. Sit-in in the street of Frankfurt am Main, 1968.

In *Heißer Sommer*, it is through the eyes of Ullrich Krause, a young student, that we witness the upheaval of the German student movement. The lead character is seduced by the counterculture of the roaring sixties, embracing the motto "sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll". It is thus as a young rebel that Ullrich goes through the hot summer of his life.

In *Sem Tecto, entre Ruínas* the younger characters, all of them university students in Lisbon, seek to put an end to the political and sociocultural stagnation that had befallen Portugal since the beginning of the Salazar regime.

Either by their left-wing political convictions or by their irreverent and detached lifestyle, the younger generation, as depicted on both novels, is moved by their will to change and to openly contest the *status quo*. This does not mean the depictions are homogenous: what comes across as most striking is the multiple approaches to the mythical year of 1968.



Fig 7. Student demonstration in Coimbra, 1969.

### CONCLUSION

This master thesis was distinguished by «Primeiras Teses» [First dissertations], an initiative of the Portuguese Literature Centre of the Coimbra University that aims at making known the investigations of young researchers in literary studies.

I am currently working on a similar project which focuses on the depictions of youth, the student protest and the conflict of generations in various novels from the German, English, French, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish literatures. This dissertation is being developed within the PhD programme in Cultural Studies shared by the University of Aveiro and University of Minho.



Fig 1. Novels (First edition covers)

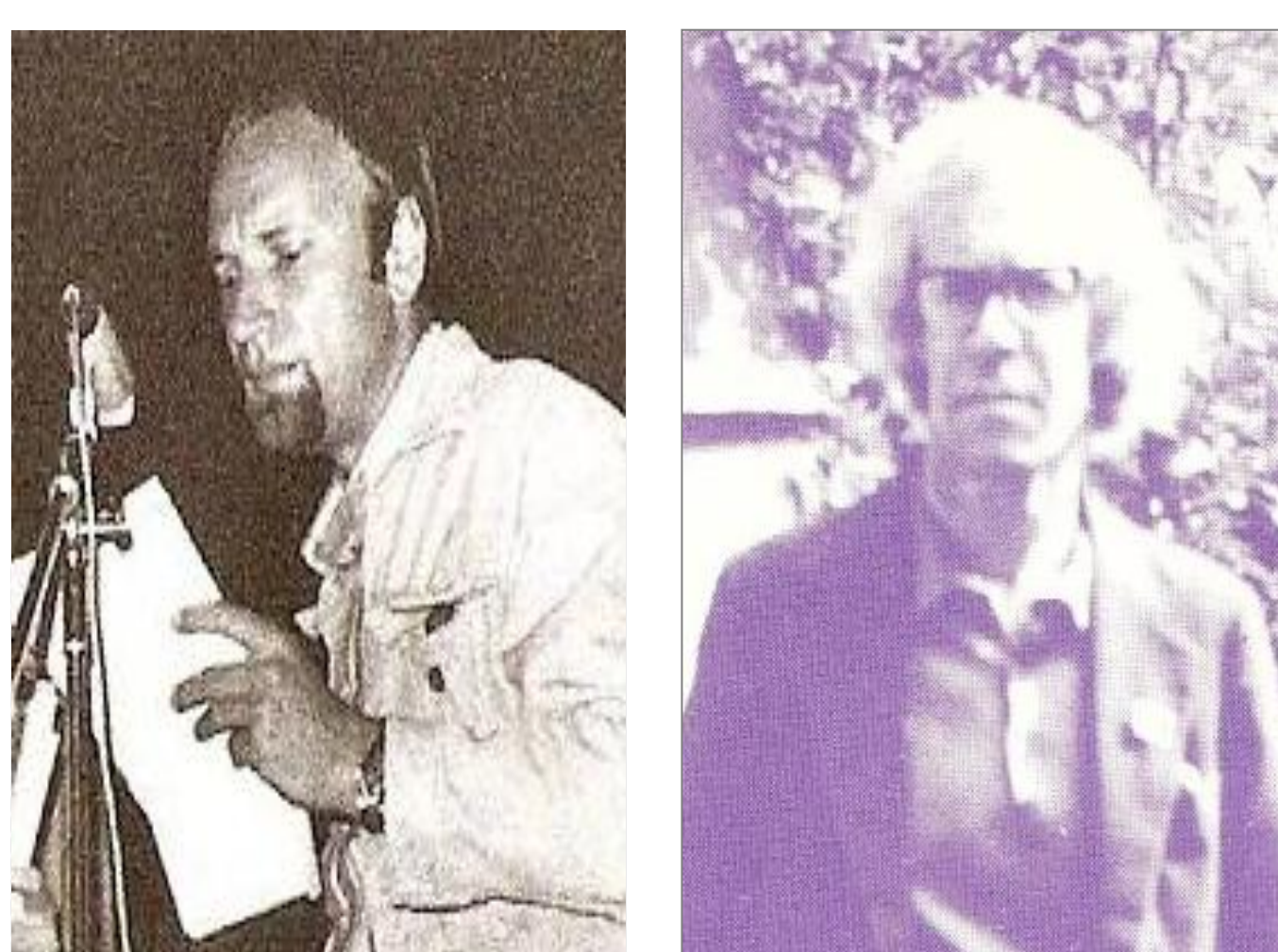


Fig 2. Authors: Uwe Timm and Augusto Abelaira