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ANTÓNIO OSÓRIO

(Portugal, 1933-2021)

[Monday 1 September 2008]

António Osório was born in 1933 and published his first book in 1972, when he was almost forty. Descended from a family with an impressive literary and artistic tradition – Ana de Castro Osório (1872–1935), for instance, was one of Portugal’s first writers of children’s literature and also published the first edition of the greatest work of Portuguese symbolist poetry, *Clepsidra*, by Camilo Pessanha – António Osório pursued a career in law. He served both as the head of the Portuguese Bar Association and as president of the Portuguese Association for Environmental Law. This concern for the environment is reflected in his poetry, which can justifiably be called ‘ecological’.

From the very first books, *A Raiz Afectuosa* (The Affectionate Root) and *A Ignorância da Morte* (Ignorance of Death), which were self-published in the 1970s, Osório’s poetry has paid impassioned, meticulous and astonished attention to the infinite variety of beings and things that surround us. It is a hymn to diversity, a kind of Noah’s ark providing shelter for practitioners of nearly extinct professions such as shoeshine boys and pavers who work with stone, for humble creatures such as the domesticated rabbit or the firefly of rural nights, and even for the rusty tractor doomed to the junkyard.

This conservationist vocation is mirrored in his writing, which has never accommodated the stylistic ruptures proposed by vanguard movements, preferring instead a tranquil, peaceful diction, which is not on that account less intense. It is the appropriate register for a poetry that avoids emotional extremes – erotic passion, anger, despair, ecstasy – to express more subtle and discreet nuances of human sentimentality: serene affection for an aunt, the wonder of watching children grow up, the appreciation of a patient when he hears a nightingale sing on the fence outside the hospital, the mixture of joy and sad nostalgia felt visiting places frequented by one’s parents when they were first in love, and even simple kindness, that so singularly human virtue which rarely gets its due. In an increasingly frenetic world, serenity can become a moral imperative. In a poem consisting of only five lines, Osório writes: “The contrary / of hysteria, of

barbarity. // Bird migrating / discreetly / over continents.”

Osório has a particularly remarkable talent for making a perfectly conventional sequence of words – a stock phrase we’ve all heard in daily speech – provoke a shock as strong as the most unexpected association of ideas produced by a skilled surrealist. Consider the final lines of the poem ‘I still take refuge’. The poem is built around the absence of the narrator’s father, an absence made palpable by an inventory of things they shared: the honeysuckle, the stove, the bougainvillea that needs to be pruned. And then the poem abruptly closes with: “Mother / isn’t here and isn’t coming back.” This piece of information is conveyed to the father, in such a manner that we, the readers, are at a loss to say what moves us more: the obvious grief of the orphaned son or the hypothetical grief of the dead man whom the son addresses. In any case, it is the very plainness of that final sentence that goes a long way to making it so poignant.

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POEMS

GUTS

GRATITUDE THAT DOESN'T EVEN KNOW

I STILL TAKE REFUGE

SEED HOUSE

RESURRECTION OF LEOPOLDO PANERO

THE INNOCENT MAILBAG

THE TRACTOR SPEAKS

Guts

Child that, leg by tiny
leg, then the guts,
divests a cricket
of its minuscule soul.

And no one can remake
the cricket and the child.

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VÍSCERAS

Criança que despeja um grilo,
pata a pata,
víscera a víscera,
da sua pequeníssima alma.

E não há quem refaça
o grilo e a criança.

© 1982, António Osório
From: *Décima aurora*
Publisher: Regra do Jogo, Lisbon

Gratitude that doesn't even know

Gratitude that doesn't even know
whom it should be grateful to

For a calf, a colt
roaming about the pasture,
a lighthouse, a fire truck ladder,
a cask of milk, of wine.

For a kiss, a probe
that doesn't return from Venus,
a harvest, a crop
of lovers.

For being a believer and nonbeliever,
tied to the womb and fiercely
faithful to himself.

Grateful to the beginning, to what
was purged, to the placenta.

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Gratidão que nem sabe
a quem deve ser grata.

Por um novilho, um poldro
vagueando na pastagem,
um farol, uma escada magirus,
uma vasilha de leite, de vinho

Por um beijo, uma sonda
que não regressa de Vénus,
uma safra, uma ceifa
de amantes.

Por ser crente e descrente,
matricial e fiel
ferozmente a si próprio.

Ao início, ao que foi
expurgado, à placenta, grato.

© 1981, António Osório
From: *O lugar do amor*
Publisher: Gota de Água, Porto

I Still Take Refuge

I still take refuge
in your honeysuckle, Father.
Over there, lush as ever,
is the passion flower.
The tall cedar, even taller.
The stove, the smudged
fingerprints on the doors.
The bougainvillea, which needs
to be pruned, I know. Mother
isn't here and isn't coming back.

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AINDA ME ACOLHO

Ainda me acolho, Pai,
à tua madressilva.
Ali tens a passiflora,
não envelheceu.
O cedro grande, maior ainda.
O forno, dedadas
expungidas pelas portas.
A buganvília, não esqueço,
é preciso cortá-la.
A Mãe não está nem volta.

© 1978, António Osório
From: *A ignorância da morte*
Publisher: Author's edition, Lisbon

Seed House

It's sad not to have a seed house.
It's useless to cherish those particles lying idle
or to hope that they'll nest without sleet
and erupt like the flame of a candle.

It's sad to pay money for what naturally grows,
sad that berseem loses its sorrel colour in the
soil,
and that Persian clover feeds the mouths of
cattle.

It's sad they don't reject that profuse,
prodigious,
stubborn servitude, that vitality in love with the
sun,
and don't add up what they're owed, like a
peasant,
demanding wages for the machinations of God
and men.

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Resurrection of Leopoldo Panero

I

No, Panero, I don't believe
in the resurrection of the flesh.
Don't wait beneath that stone:
God has always had the face
of an incorruptible man
doing battle with his demons.
Lazarus, who knew everything and said
nothing, lies next to you.

It's better to restore to others
that bygone age fifteen,
to hope that they will shine
and survive, like seeds of alfalfa,
and to write verses like yours,
which arrested the divine fire and snow,
and to love those verses as if there
your eyes and the faith that inflamed them
still glowed, without any ashes.

CASA DAS SEMENTES

É triste não possuir uma casa de sementes.
Não adianta amar essas partículas ali ociosas,
nem desejar que nidifiquem sem granizo
e irrompam como a chama de uma vela.

É triste pagar um preço pelo que há-de nascer,
que o bersim perca a cor alazã penetrando na
terra
e o trevo da Pérsia alimente a boca das reses.

É triste que não recusem essa densa, pródiga,
obstinada servidão, a vitalidade apaixonada pelo
sol,
e não façam, como um camponês, as suas
contas,
exigindo a Deus e aos homens o salário da
maquinação.

© 1978, António Osório
From: *A ignorância da morte*
Publisher: Author's edition, Lisbon

Ressurreição De Leopoldo Panero

I

Não, Panero, não creio
na ressurreição da carne.
Não esperes debaixo dessa pedra:
Deus teve sempre a face
de um homem incorruptível
lutando contra os seus demónios.
Lázaro, que tudo soube e nada
disse, jaz a teu lado.

É melhor restituir aos outros
os nossos quinze anos,
a esperança de que sejam luminosos
e sobrevivam, como sementes de luzerna,
e escrever, como tu, versos
que detinham o fogo e a neve divinas
e amá-los como se neles
resplandescessem ainda os teus olhos
e a fé que os abrasava, limpos de cinza.

II

That said, Panero, I wish I could
quench your thirst with a honeycomb,
revive your sense of smell with mint and fennel,
your sight with those blue eyes you loved,
your touch with your own newborn skin.

Yes, I wish you could say
that you'd witnessed the transfiguration
of the God of the dead into the God of the living
and that He suffered more than his Son
to come out of the grave, and anointed
your bones, cleansing your inner leprosy,
and that your soul penetrated your body
like springtime inside a nest.

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The Innocent Mailbag

Were I an object, I'd love to see myself
as a mail train. Long and nocturnal,
penetrating the interior, fleetingly
noticed by pine groves and stars,
wolves, crags and enchanted things.
It's good to stop at every station.
To nod with sleepiness, drink wine, be
a row of seated rural folk, children, smugglers.
The meek and toothless peasant woman who
prays.
In every car there's always
a voluntary clown who guffaws
his happiness: ah, to crown him
with the rooster's bugle. And to leave
in each place the clay amphoras of passions
(nearly always conflicted, fortuitous,
frightening): to collaborate, to fill
the postman's innocent mailbag.

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II

E contudo, Panero, desejaria
matar-te a sede com um favo de mel,
com hortelã e funcho despertar-te o olfacto,
a vista com os olhos que amavas, azuis,
o tacto com a própria pele, recém-nascida.

Desejaria, sim, pudesses dizer
que presenciaste a transfiguração
do Deus dos mortos em Deus dos vivos
e que Ele sofreu mais que o Filho
para sair do sepulcro, e te ungiu
os ossos purificando a íntima lepra,
e que a tua alma penetrou no corpo
como a primavera dentro de um ninho.

© 1978, António Osório

From: *A ignorância da morte*, 1978

Publisher: Author's edition, Lisbon

A INOCENTE MALA

Se eu fosse uma coisa, amaria ver-me
como comboio-correio. Longo e nocturno,
devassando o interior, contemplado
de fugida por pinhais e estrelas,
lobos, penhascos e embruxados.
Bom parar em todas as estações.
Cabecear de sono, beber vinho, ser
banco de campónios, crianças, contrabandistas.
Aldeã que reza, desdentada e solícita.
Em cada carruagem existe sempre
um voluntário palhaço que golfa
sua alegria: coroa-lo com o clarim
do galo. E deixar em todos os lugares
as ânforas de barro das paixões
(quase sempre mal-avindas, fortuitas,
temerosas): colaborar, encher
a inocente mala do carteiro.

© 1982, António Osório

From: *Décima aurora*

Publisher: Regra do Jogo, Lisbon

The Tractor Speaks

I don't like this grasshopper body.
I'm constant, I tremble, others use me,
a slave of the land. I tear open and lay flat.
Through me runs a shaft of painful, serene
transmission. It's hard to drag
a cow to its grave. I've already injured
a leg. I hate the weight of the trailer.
Five years and I still don't understand these
grimy parts that turn inside me.
At least the power shovel roars
(I love her). Scrap iron makes me shudder.

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FALA O TRACTOR

Não gosto deste perfil de gafanhoto.
Constante sou, trepido, usam-me,
servo da gleba. Rasgo e acamo,
tenho um veio de dolorosa, serena
transmissão. Custa levar de rojo
uma vaca à cova. Esmaguei já
uma perna. Detesto o peso do reboque.
Cinco anos e ainda não percebo estas
sujas peças que rodam em mim.
A escavadora, ao menos, uiva
(amo-a). Não me agrada a sucata.

© 1978, António Osório
From: *A ignorância da morte*
Publisher: Author's edition, Lisbon

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