Gastão Cruz was born in 1941 in Faro, the capital city of the Algarve, Portugal’s southern-most coastal region. In 1958 he went to study at the University of Lisbon’s Faculty of Letters, where he completed a degree in Germanic Studies. In 1961 he took part in the publication of a poetic collective called Poesia 61, in which he published his first collection of poems, Percussive Death. This was followed by six more collections over the next ten years, as well as Names, a collection of the previous works, in 1974. Since then, he has published thirteen more collections, including the most recent, A Moeda do Tempo.

Along with poetry, Cruz has always pursued a career in literary criticism, serving as poetry critic for the Diário de Lisboa, Seara Nova, and Crítica during the sixties and early seventies. This culminated in a book of highly regarded poetry criticism, Portuguese Poetry Today. An interest in theater blossomed in the mid seventies, when he cofounded Theater Today, a repertory group that remained active for twenty years. In 1977 he became theater critic for Vida Mundial and O Jornal. Meanwhile, he began translating plays, beginning with Fernand Crommelynck’s The Childish Lovers, as well as Strindberg’s The Pelican, Chekhov’s The Sea Gull, and, more recently, Shakespeare’s A Winter Tale. Cruz lived in England from 1980 to 1986 while lecturing on Portuguese literature at King’s College, University of London. During this period he read a great deal of English poetry and translated some of Blake’s Songs of Innocence and of Experience.

Gastão Cruz’s poetry speaks of the natural world around us, but its real concern is most often with our ephemeral bodies and our futile efforts at permanence. Transcience and death loom behind the vital
experience or the vital world, and the tragic nature of time informs all. Portugal’s intimate relation with the sea serves the poet well in this respect, as images of foundering, of sinking into the abyss, into nothingness, recur like the tolling of a fog-enshrouded buoy. This is a poet of a certain stoic reserve and intellectual dispassion, but whatever his demeanor, he can never forget the weight of the human condition.

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POEMS

BREATH
COOL LEMONS
EMBANKMENT
GHOSTS
MORNING
RAVEN IN HYDE PARK (1989)
WALL

BREATH

I won’t be able
to pull you from that abyss
place you at the table
I, too,
I know it well enough, am also somehow dead,
with you with this
day
that in taking shape left
the breath of time
audible in the cotton with which they stuffed your mouth

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SOLUÇO

Não poderei
tirar-te desse abismo
sentar-te à mesa
já estou
também, sei bem, um pouco morto,
por ti por esse
dia
que ao formar-se deixou
o soluço do tempo
audível no algodão com que taparam a tua boca

© 2002, Gastão Cruz
From: Rua de Portugal
Publisher: Assírio & Alvim, Lisbon
COOL LEMONS

Each time we came to the house of our long dead great grandparents who had chosen for it a place in the purity of absolute earth as spring was just beginning and grandmother would greet the swallows as if they were the same returning from the previous year and the buzzing of the beetles would make me feel that something was changing in my days and summer would be rising and the afternoon heat would swell my adolescent sex and before going back to shaking down the almonds my young uncle in a silence of sweat would be lying asleep each time we would see cool lemons dropping from their tree

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OS LIMÕES FRIOS

De cada vez que vínhamos à casa dos bisavós longinquamente mortos que para ela tinham escolhido um lugar na pureza da terra absoluta quando principiava a primavera e a avó saudava as andorinhas como se no regresso do ano anterior as mesmas fossem e o sopro dos besouros me fazia sentir que qualquer coisa novamente mudara nos meus dias e o verão subia e o calor da tarde intumescia o sexo adolescente e antes de regressar ao varejo da amêndoa num silêncio de suor o jovem tio dormia da árvore desprendem-se os limões frios

© 2002, Gastão Cruz
From: Rua de Portugal
Publisher: Assírio & Alvim, Lisbon

EMBANKMENT

In the end when cities are nothing but rubble search through your home scourged by the water at its banks for the last mirror and ask: the lost places the banks why do you try to grasp them with the water?

© Translation: 2001, Alexis Levitin
From: Mid-American Review, XXI, 2 Publisher: Bowling Green State University, Ohio, 2001

EMBANKMENT

No fim quando as cidades não forem senão escombros procura na morada flagelada pela água das margens o espelho derradeiro e interroga: os lugares perdidos as margens por que tentas prendê-los com a água?

© 1995, Gastão Cruz
From: As Pedras Negras
Publisher: Relógio d’Água, Lisbon
GHOSTS

And you remain Born within the light you strayed through sands that were the universe for you Now you find yourself in different times in which the bird that flies across August to its end no longer sees you and you can’t see the wings consuming you But life discovers you alone stumbling upon the flesh of ghosts And you remain That light is nothingness The beach has already entered infinite summer Eternal dawn expels you But you remain Memory interprets you, you are the victim of the day that rejects and yet exhibits you In that light of beginnings you survive questioning your incorruptible body

© Translation: 2001, Alexis Levitin From: Mid-American Review, XXI, 2 Publisher: Bowling Green State University, Ohio, 2001

ESPECTROS

Restas Dentro da luz nascido erraste nas areias que foram para ti o universo Estás em tempos diversos onde a ave que sobrevoa agosto até ao extremo já não te vê e tu não podes ver as asas que te queimam Mas a vida descobre-te sozinho tropeçando na carne dos espectros E tu restas Essa luz é o nada A praia já entrou no verão infinito A aurora eterna expulsa-te Mas restas A memória interpreta-te és a vítima do dia que te recusa e exibe Nessa luz da origem sobrevives interrogando o corpo incorruptível

© 1995, Gastão Cruz From: As Pedras Negras Publisher: Relógio d’Água, Lisbon

MORNING

That’s how the morning is, a name for the world, opening one’s eyes like someone who is speaking May time or diurnal death give to open eyes the nothingness of words

A MANHÃ

É assim a manhã, um nome para o mundo, abrir os olhos como alguém que fala Podem o tempo ou a morte diurna dar aos olhos abertos o nada das palavras
And so the sun will be
the silence in a look or a hand
upon a forehead
that brings the eyelids down
as if the fingers were giving to the head the truth
hidden in that nothingness

and the morning were coming
not like a vast shadow to clothe the body’s voice
but to cover it with
the light
of the words that are not there

© Translation: 2007, Alexis Levitin

RAVEN IN HYDE PARK (1989)

With its beak it lifts September’s leaves
in intervals it listens to the music of the birds
then walks across the mottled dawn
It stops again listens then flies low
across the green and chestnut carpeting of time

© Translation: 2002, Alexis Levitin
From: The Dirty Goat, 12
Publisher: Host Publications, Austin, Texas, 2002

WALL

The thick transparency
of the air that slowly
took shape so quickly
before one’s gaze

is that of a fluid wall
that won’t let through
the impure murmur
of a voice with neither light nor air

© Translation: 2007, Alexis Levitin

MURO

A transparência espessa
do ar que devagar
se formou tão depressa
em frente do olhar

é a de um muro fluido
que não deixa passar
o impuro murmurio
da voz sem luz nem ar

© 2002, Gastão Cruz
From: Rua de Portugal
Publisher: Assírio & Alvim, Lisbon
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Links

In Portuguese

DGLAB

Bio-bibliographical information