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GASTÃO CRUZ

(Portugal, 1941-2022)

[Thursday 1 November 2007]

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. Transience 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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SOLUÇÃO

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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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

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
princiava 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
de cada vez nós víamos
da árvore desprenderem-se
os limões frios

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

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

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

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 exhibe Nessa
luz da origem
sobrevives
interrogando o corpo incorruptível

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

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

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O sol será então
o silêncio no olhar ou a mão
sobre a testa
que faz descer as pálpebras
como se os dedos dessem à cabeça a verdade
submersa nesse nada

e a manhã viesse
não como sombra vasta vestir a voz
do corpo
mas cobri-la da
luz
das palavras que faltam

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

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

O CORVO DE HYDE PARK (1989)

Com o bico levanta as folhas de setembro
Nos intervalos ouve a música dos pássaros
e volta a caminhar sobre a relva manchada
Para de novo escuta e voa baixo
sobre o tapete verde e castanho do tempo

© 1990, Gastão Cruz
From: *As Leis do Caos*
Publisher: Assírio & Alvim, Lisbon

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 murmúrio
da voz sem luz nem ar

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

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Links

In Portuguese

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