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MARGARIDA VALE DE GATO

(Portugal, 1973)

Margarida Vale de Gato (Portugal, 1973) has been teaching American Studies and Literary Translation in the faculty of letters at the University of Lisbon since 2007. In 2008 she earned a PhD with a dissertation on the reception of Edgar Allan Poe in modern Portuguese poetry. As a literary translator from English and French, she has published an impressive list of works, both poetry and prose, by authors such as Lewis Carroll, Herman Melville, Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, Oscar Wilde, W.B. Yeats, Christina Rossetti, Vladimir Nabokov, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, George Sand, Jean Giono, Henri Michaux, Nathalie Sarraute and René Char.

Although Vale de Gato has been publishing poetry since the age of sixteen, her first collection, *Mulher ao mar* (Woman Overboard) did not appear until 2010. It was a mature debut which immediately marked her one of the most important poetic voices of her generation. Four years later, an extended version, *Mulher ao mar retorna* (Woman Overboard Returns) appeared, and in 2016, this was followed by a new collection, *Lançamento* (an ambiguous title that may mean to throw or cast, begin or launch). Woman, the sea and love play major roles in her poetry, as topics and in a number of motifs.

Vale de Gato sees herself as an unhurried, peripheral, reactive poet: she does not create from a void but writes as a reaction to others who elicit her thought. The result is poetry characterised by a certain deliberation: carefully formed reflections where quotes and allusions are used frequently ('Alice', for example, teems with references to Shakespeare) and several layers of meaning hide beneath an – often misleading – simplicity and lightness. Thus 'Woman overboard' can be read as a poem about drowning, the act of lovemaking and writing poetry:

*MAYDAY I break out: the hard war endures;
empty is the vessel from which I part -
it slacks in the deep, bored by the sway,
a leaking slit, a lack - not in the least
a cork pail with pores made to drift.*

Both in her translations of poetry and in her own work, Margarida Vale de Gato uses a variety of forms and a wide selection of poetic devices. Tight, serrated forms (a sonnet pattern in ‘Adversaries’, almost Dickinson-like in ‘Woman overboard’), a litany-like cadence of repetitions in ‘Intercity’, long resonant salvos of words in ‘ALICE’. Typical are the scant punctuation and the unemphatic effects of rhythm and sound which unconsciously prompt the reader to re-read the text.

© Arie Pos (Translated by Christiane Zwerner)

POEMS

DIANA

EMULATORS

INTERCITY

INTRODUCTORY TEXT

MEDEA

RUI COSTA, PIG-HEADED, ABOUT EVERYTHING

WOMAN OVERBOARD

DIANA

‘I, too, dislike it: there are things that are important beyond all this fiddle,’ Marianne Moore said about poetry. In any case, she was able to see mitochondria and all the other tiny lives – eye fixed on the minute blotch of watercolor compressed between two glass slides the pupil round with wonder just before mystery: to know what it was.

Is it more important to observe or to designate? I fear sometimes I look askew forget the tree where I left my keys and my notebook, then I don’t know what to call what, kind or relation, though I find tranquility in the arcane language of the plane trees

DIANA

“Eu cá também não gosto, há mais coisas além deste desconchavo”, dizia Marianne Moore da poesia. De resto, conseguia ver mitocôndrias e as demais pequenas vidas – olho fixo na miúda mancha de aquarela comprimida entre vidros de lamela redonda a pupila em maravilha prévia ao mistério: saber o que era.

Mais importa observar ou designar? Eu erro no olhar receio às vezes esqueço a árvore onde deixei as chaves e o caderno, depois não sei chamar o quê, espécie ou parentesco, ache embora sossego na língua arcana dos plátanos atrás das placas do jardim botânico. Portanto sirvo mal, sou outra, fora do baralho, turista aqui em tanto

behind the plaques in the botanical garden.
So I serve badly, I'm other, the odd one
out, a tourist here in so much

that pleases me and is work.
But it's still not said (or is) if I insist
on my small scale in this myself
it's because I don't disconnect and touch and
fail
at what's in plain sight, raw
language clear in brute sky

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EMULATORS

Was it circus or siege, gesture or style
the act of embracing? was it candor
such tenderness together such ardor
in a climate of luxury and guile?

The thing we did, was it the same as love,
or tacit touch? the two of us in want
and morningless, yielding to the moment;
getting fucked was an awkward move.

Seen objectively, no one was deluded
it was the real thing – only the placebo
with some excess accelerates the libido.

And I betrayed, unjust . . . long-winded,
that zeal that nothing should be said,
and how I wanted to go down liquid.

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* In the English translation the first two stanzas have
been switched deliberately.

do que me dá prazer e algum trabalho.
Mas não está dito ainda (ou está) se insisto
à minha pouca escala nisto eu
é porque não desligo e toco e falho
no material à vista, língua
crua clara em bruto céu

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From: *Lançamento*
Publisher: Douda Correria, Lisboa

ÉMULOS

Foi como amor aquilo que fizemos
ou tacto tácito? – os dois carentes
e sem manhã sujeitos ao presente;
foi logro aceite quando nos fodemos.

Foi circo ou cerco, gesto ou estilo
o acto de abraçarmos? foi candura
o termos juntos sexo com ternura
num clima de aparato e de sigilo.

Se virmos bem ninguém foi iludido
de que era a coisa em si – só o placebo
com algum excesso que acelera a libido.

E eu, palavrosa, injusta desconheço
o zelo de que nada fosse dito
e quanto quis tocar em estado líquido.

© 2010, Margarida Vale de Gato
From: *Mulher ao Mar*
Publisher: Mariposa Azual, Lisboa

INTERCITY

we ride down the backs of hills inside
the earth eating eucalyptus eating haystacks
spitting out the wind spitting out time spitting
out
time
time the trains gulp the opposite way going
the opposite way stealing our time my love

I need you who are flying
to me
but you fly unfurling sails over the sea
you have wing-space you hover you drift while
I
keep crawling towards you along the rails
with occasional sparks I write to you my love
cheating your absence the claustrophobia of the
mustard
colored curtains you walk on water and now
I know
words are less worthy than boats

I need you my love in this loneliness this
forsakenness
of thick curtains preventing the sun preventing
my
flight and nevertheless on the opposite side
the sky boasts little lamb clouds hopping
hopping on oats and wheat fields there are none
here
we eat eucalyptus eucalyptus and whitewashed
churches
leaning over level-crossing whitewashed
churches
my love
I smoke a cigarette in between two stops I read
Lobo Antunes I think people are sad people
are so sad people are pathetic my
love just as well you hide me from the world
you hide
me from the world's patronising smiles the
world's
self-righteous consent
by night on your loins my love I
am also a boat sitting on top of your body
I am a mast

INTERCIDADES

galopamos pelas costas dos montes no interior
da terra a comer eucaliptos a comer os entulhos
de feno
a cuspir o vento a cuspir o tempo a cuspir
o tempo
o tempo que os comboios do sentido contrário
engolem
do sentido contrário roubam-nos o tempo meu
amor

preciso de ti que vens voando
até mim
mas voas à vela sobre o mar
e tens espaço asas por isso vogas à deriva
enquanto eu
vou rastejando ao teu encontro sobre os carris
faiscando
ocasionalmente e escrevo para ti meu amor
a enganar a tua ausência a claustrofobia de
cortinas
cor de mostarda tu caminhas sobre a água e
agora
eu sei
as palavras valem menos do que os barcos

preciso de ti meu amor nesta solidão neste
desamparo
de cortinas espessas que impedem o sol que me
impedem
de voar e ainda assim do outro lado
o céu exhibe nuvens pequeninas carneirinhos a
trotar
a trotar sobre searas de aveia e trigais aqui não
há
comemos eucaliptos eucaliptos e igrejas caiadas
debruçadas sobre os apeadeiros igrejas caiadas
meu amor
eu fumo um cigarro entre duas paragens leio
o Lobo Antunes e penso as pessoas são tristes as
as pessoas são tão tristes as pessoas são
patéticas meu
amor ainda bem que tu me escondes do mundo
me escondes
dos sorrisos condescendentes do mundo da
comiseração

I need you my love I am tired I ache
close to where my eyes are set I feel like crying
still I
desire you but before before you touch me
before you say
I want you my love you shall let me sleep a
hundred years
a hundred years from today we'll be boats again
I am lonely
Portugal is everlasting we eat eucalyptus
everlasting eucalyptus lean and green
we eat eucalyptus interspersed with shrubs
we eat eucalyptus the ache of your absence my
love
we eat this heat and the railtracks and anguish
set ablaze inside Lobo Antunes' novel
we eat eucalyptus and Portugal is everlasting
Portugal
is huge and I need you and in the opposite way
they are stealing
time it's our time they are stealing my love it's
time
time for us to be boats and sail through walls
inside rooms

my love to be boats at night
at night to blow oh sweetly blow into full sail

boats.

do mundo
à noite no teu corpo meu amor eu
também sou um barco sentada sobre o teu
ventre
sou um mastro

preciso de ti meu amor estou cansada dói-me
em volta dos olhos tenho vontade de chorar
mesmo assim
desejo-te mas antes antes de me tocares de
dizeres quero-te
meu amor há-de deixar-me dormir cem anos
depois de cem anos voltaremos a ser barcos
eu estou só
Portugal nunca mais acaba comemos eucaliptos
eucaliptos intermináveis longos e verdes
comemos eucaliptos entremeados de arbustos
comemos eucaliptos a dor da tua ausência meu
amor
comemos este calor e os caminhos de ferro e a
angústia
a deflagrar combustão no livro do Lobo
Antunes
comemos eucaliptos e Portugal nunca mais
acaba Portugal
é enorme eu preciso de ti e em sentido contrário
roubam-nos
o tempo roubam-nos o tempo meu amor tempo
o tempo para sermos barcos e atravessar
paredes dentro dos quartos

meu amor para sermos barcos à noite
à noite a soprar docemente sobre as velas acesas

barcos.

© 2010, Margarida Vale de Gato
From: *Mulher ao Mar*
Publisher: Mariposa Azul, Lisboa

INTRODUCTORY TEXT

1.
For me it makes little difference:
poet, poetess –
depends on the measure, and the stress –
I prefer translator, but admit
that I sometimes can't be plied, I'm a narcissist.

2.
My earliest poetry was about rain
and weeping. Today it would be
prose and rain, or gunpowder:

it's raining out, wind rapes the window,
a street is never like the brochures –
With fine eloquence I stab my note

to the world through my heart.
It bursts, withered muscle bloat –
a thousand times that life were more than art.

3.
If the line's strict measure doesn't aim to show
but is a seeking instead –
or is the taste of what it finds . . .
If I don't write to order,
but showered by latter rain.

4.
Certainly, I can pose
for the camera,
mold my mouth to the click, close
down the diaphragm. It depends
how the roll is developed –
model artist prey, I'm like everyone:
the lives I don't touch interest me
in uneven parts of avarice and voracity.
Before they know me, period,
they know me periodically.

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TEXTO DE APRESENTAÇÃO

1.
É-me indiferente: poeta, poetisa
dependerá do ritmo ou da medida –
prefiro tradutora, mas admito
que por vezes não dobro e sou narcisa.

2.
A minha primeira poesia era
sobre chuva e choro. Hoje seria
prosa, ou sobre chuva e a pólvora:

chove fora viola o vento o vidro,
a rua nunca é como os prospectos –
O meu bilhete ao mundo, espeto-o

com delicado verbo ao coração.
Rebenta, murcho músculo entupido –
mil vezes fosse a vida a exceção.

3.
se o rigor do verso não visa qualquer prova
senão procura –
ou provar o que seja de sabor.
Se não escrevo por encomenda
senão por ventura serôdia

4.
posso posar, certamente,
para a máquina fotográfica,
moldar a boca ao disparo ou regular
a abertura ao diafragma. Dependente
do papel revelador –
modelo artista presa, sou como todos:
as vidas que não toco interessam-me
num desequilíbrio de voracidade e avareza.
Antes ainda assim me conheçam de vista
que de revista.

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MEDEA

They say she killed her own brother,
descends from the Sun and barbarian soil,
and gave an animal with golden fur
to a practical, not very spiritual young man
who had taken her breath away. But he
also wanted a throne, a second
wife and a country to rule.

When a sorceress weeps she invokes
demons who invoke curses.
The writer, aware of her motive, steadies
the knees of the magic demigoddess
and empathically paints on her mouth
the tragic words: I wanted nothing
for myself, I did it all for you.

And the course of the world entertains
the audience, the crime's accomplices,
those it profited and those it petrified.
And tears roll with each free motion,
and the acuteness of her suffering softens
our shock. The cloak she weaves
smothers with flames, and the spurting
blood and burning flesh truly excite us.

What remains is a pair of infant corpses
at their father's feet: the sky is empty
and no one has yet left the hall.
To conclude the act the genius
solemnly declares that there, on stage,
people love and kill. No more
speeches. He leans back and sets down

his pen with its poisonous nib.

© Translation: 2015, Richard Zenith
From: *28 Portuguese Poets*
Publisher: Dedalus Press, Dublin, 2015

MEDEIA

Diz-se que matou o próprio irmão,
que descende do Sol e solo bárbaro,
e que, deslumbrada por jovem prático
e pouco espiritual, lhe deu
um animal de lã dourada. Ele
porém ainda quis um trono, outro
matrimónio e o mando dum país.

Quando uma feiticeira chora invoca
demónios que invocam malefícios.
O escritor, atento ao móbil, fixa
os joelhos da semideusa mágica
e empático pinta-lhe na boca
a palavra trágica: eu nada quis
para mim, por ti só tudo fiz.

E o mundo entretém no seu decurso
o público. Do crime participa
quem dele tira prémio ou espanto –
E o pranto corre a cada livre gesto
e o excesso com que sofre nos consola
o sobressalto. E o manto que tece
sufoca em chamas e excita deveras
o sangue a correr e a carne a arder.

Resta um par de cadáveres infantis
aos pés do pai: o céu está vazio
e ninguém saiu ainda da sala.
Para concluir o acto o génio
declara solene que ali se ama
e mata sobre a cena. Não mais
discursos. Inclina-se e repousa

a pena com a ponta de veneno.

From: *Lançamento*, 2016
Publisher: Doula Correria, Lisboa

RUI COSTA, PIG-HEADED, ABOUT EVERYTHING

It began with a mole next to your sunglasses,
No,
the beginning was a margin at night where you
wanted to teach me
how to spell out verses, No, restart: breakfast
in a small café on a long street with legs in the
sea
and Dom Rodrigues bunched in lustrous
wrappers on the table, No
it must have been only when we stretched out
our hands they slid
and we bumped our chests together clanking
you laughed I
made a fool of myself, Maybe it was there
because we wrote about it
each one understanding in his own way just as
it's always
been, Though I warned you at once that I had
no hope
we'd ever coincide you thought sure excellent
because
that way we'd constantly want to probe each
other
always pinching ourselves to see where it
touched
there in the depths where it hurt not to fit
perfectly
together, Only that yes it's a privilege it happens
fewer
times than we have fingers finding
someone who we want to keep beating as
you said you would do to me for a lifetime
when you squeezed
the resistance of material below my arms, And
it must have
been delicacy not to justify yourself despite the
pride
of performing feats we never count the
beginnings or the ends

so I'm waiting for you to show up behind an
SMS with an apple
pie hoisted to your muzzle, That the game of
making all those
important gestures in the doorway doesn't
exhaust you so later
you freshen up like it was nothing and flee

RUI COSTA, CABEÇUDO, POR TUDO

Começou com um sinal ao lado dos teus óculos
escuros, Não,
o princípio foi um rebordo à noite onde quiseste
ensinar-me
a soletração de versos, Não, reinício: o pequeno
almoço
num café pequeno numa rua comprida com
pernas para o mar
e dons rodrigos enxovalhos de lustro postos à
mesa, Não
há de ter sido só quando esticámos as mãos elas
escorregaram
e nos encostámos aos peitos os dois
chocalhavam tu riste-te eu
fiz-me de parva, Se calhar foi aí porque
escrevemos sobre isso
entendendo cada um à sua maneira como
sempre se
fez, Eu adverti logo aliás não tinha nenhuma
esperança
que viéssemos a coincidir alguma vez tu achaste
claro
muito bem feito porque assim queríamos
constantemente
aprofundarmo-nos sempre aos apalpões a ver
onde derretia
quando lá no fundo dóia não encaixarmos
perfeita
mente, Só que sim é um privilégio acontece
menos
vezes do que os dedos encontrarmos alguém
a quem queiramos continuar a bater como
disseste que me fazias a vida toda quando
apertaste por
baixo dos meus braços a resistência dos
materiais, E há de
ter sido gentileza não justificares apesar do
orgulho
de cumprir proezas não contamos os princípios
nem os fins

fico pois à espera que apareças atrás de um sms
com uma tarte
de maçã encostada ao focinho, Que não te cansa
o jogo de fazeres
todos os gestos importantes entre portas para
depois te pores ao
fresco como se nada fosse e largas daqui porque

because your handicap
is smaller and your paws are bigger and you
want to see other beasts full
of questions, If it was me I'd put on my Spanish
dress and we'd whirl
away like successful couples among the bien-
pensants excuse
me I'm going to go and write obscenities all
over your books.

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WOMAN OVERBOARD

MAYDAY I break out: the hard war endures;
empty is the vessel from which I part –
it slacks in the deep, bored by the sway,
a leaking slit, a lack – not in the least
a cork pail with pores made to drift.
I specify: it's terracotta, it cracks
and I am sparse in dense fluidity.
Too late, I know, help will come, if ever
so feebly I flash in obscurity
and the writing does not stay on water;
here I lie: hardly an erasure, less
than a seam the wave will slowly stitch
a slumbering quilt over where I sink.

tens um handicap
muito menor e patas maiores e queres ver outros
bichos cheios
de perguntas, Por mim punha era o vestido de
Espanha para
rodopiarmos aos casais de sucesso entre os
bem-pensantes com
licença vou escrever sobre os teus livros todos
muitos palavrões.

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From: *Lançamento*, 2016
Publisher: Douda Correria, Lisboa

MULHER AO MAR

MAYDAY lanço, porque a guerra dura
e está vazio o vaso em que parti
e cede ao fundo onde a vaga fura,
suga a fissura, uma falta – não
um tarro de cortiça que vogasse;
especifico: é terracota e fractura,
e eu sou esparsa, e a liquidez maciça.
Tarde, sei, será, se vier socorro:
se transluz pouco ao escuro este sinal,
e a água não prevê qualquer escritura
se jazo aqui: rasura apenas, branda
a costura, fará a onda em ponto
lento um manto sobre o afogamento.

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