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PAULO TEIXEIRA

(Mozambique, 1962)

[Saturday 9 November 2002]

Paulo Teixeira was born in what is now called Maputo, Mozambique. He is seen as the most important member of the generation of Portuguese poets who made their début in the 1980s. Portuguese poetry has been melancholy at all times, and more so in times of crisis.

Writing in the 16th century, when Portugal's colonial empire was near dissolution, Camões saw little hope for the future of civilization. The young poets of the 1980s display a similar pessimism in the face of a Europe on the verge of collapse. In often elegiac forms their poetry revives pre-war fears of an imminent 'Decline of the West'. Paulo Teixeira ranks first among these poets of European decline, the reviewers of a civilization which in its long history has brought only war and destruction.

For Teixeira an almost obsessive awareness of the passage of time heightens his sense of desolation when looking at the present. His apocalyptic vision finds expression in poems like 'De temporum fine comoedia (I)' and 'Waiting (2)', in which he demonstrates how television trivializes evil into an everyday banality. In 'The Head of State' the protagonist sees his country ravaged, depopulated and laid waste, as a 'Troy without epic'. In 'Waiting (3)' the elegiac tone with its frequent use of the subjunctive brings echoes of the odes of Fernando Pessoa's heteronym Ricardo Reis. Compare, for instance, Teixeira's 'Now let us stay in bed, the here and now will / soon be part of the beginning' with Reis': 'Let us free our hands, why should we tire ourselves', or 'Let us remind ourselves . that life / goes by and . never comes again.'

In *Waiting* (1997) as in most of his work, Paulo Teixeira presages with poignant accuracy the present state of Europe.

© August Willemsen (Translated by Ko Kooman)

[Paulo Teixeira took part in the Poetry International Festival Rotterdam 1999. This text was written on that occasion.]

POEMS

ADAM (ADÃO)
BIOGRAPHICAL ZONE
DE TEMPORUM FINE COMOEDIA
DEUS ABSCONDITUS
ELEGY
FULGET CRUCIS MYSTERIUM)
LAUDATOR TEMPORIS ACTI
ROSARY
THE CHILDREN
THE LAST ROMAN POET

Adam

You sit on the threshold of days
with only the politeness of your gestures.
A window opens your life onto the landscape,
cliffs where for a moment your gaze lingers
under the arched vault of the sky, whose eyelids

lower for you at night, before sleep comes.
If only there weren't the moon, lying
at your side like a corpse! In vain
your arms swing against its gleaming sword
as if dreaming to deny the world around you:

the leaves that break the air to speak with you
an alphabet, the wind that weaves lace
over the sea, a willow that bends
its knee as if for the office of eventide,
and reeds that weigh wishes as they idly bow

to you who arrive and depart, without words,
as an owl's beak probes the darkness.
Why speak? All is already known to the steps
you shed over the childhood of these paths,
scanning the future in the stars on high.

Adão

Estás sentado na soleira dos dias
só com a cortesia dos teus gestos.
Uma janela abra à paisagem a tua vida,
fragas onde repousas um momento o olhar
sob o arco de abóbada do céu, ele que por ti

fecha à noite as pálpebras, antes do sono.
Se pudesses não ser sob a lua, dormindo
a teu lado como um cadáver! Em vão
esgrimem os teus braços a espada da sua luz
como quem sonha negar o mundo à sua volta:

as folhas que instituem para contigo falar
um alfabeto, o vento que se dedica a trabalhos
de renda sobre o mar, um salgueiro que dobra
os joelhos como pelo ofício das tardes
e os juncos que vacilam uma vontade na vénia
inútil

a ti que chegas, a ti que partes, sem palavras,
o bico de um mocho indicando as trevas.
Para quê falar? Já tudo sabem esses passos
que derramas sobre a infância dos caminhos,

Why write your name there? No one
will miss you in the certainty of a world
you cannot come back to – you, the guest
of honour at the grand finale of everything,
waiting to join with the rest your ashes in the
fire.

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Biographical Zone

Now that the world has slipped like a ball
from out of god's hands to cross through
spaceless night, we know death is waiting
like a meal at our table. We surrender
our lives to the luck of each minute
and run from hill to hill as a song
would run, pushed by the wind.

The train window, polished by ice
and fire, displays the familiar wastes
(look at the far ashes and fresh blood of
twilight).

This was the world, Alma, this the image
I retain in my lungs when inhaling. If the air
escapes from my mouth I know I've lost
everything,
it's another world, and I, believe me, am its
witness.

All we have left is our memory of things
touched
and deleted on the map of poignant absence:
Prague, Hamburg, Leipzig, Vienna, that dusky
biographical zone where we let go of the past
and lost the schedule of the future.

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perscrutando a sina das estrelas no alto.

Para quê inscrever aí o teu nome? Ninguém
sentirá a falta, na certeza de um mundo
a que não podereis regressar, tu, convidado
de honra para assistires ao fim de tudo,
esperas unir aos outros no incêndio as tuas
cinzas.

© 1991, Paulo Teixeira
From: *Inventário e despedida*
Publisher: Caminho, Lisboa

Zona Biográfica

Agora que o mundo deslizou como uma bola
das mãos de deus e cruza a noite vazia
dos espaços sabemos que a morte nos espera
disposta como uma refeição à nossa mesa.
Rendemos à sorte de cada minuto as nossas
vidas e corremos de monte em monte como
correria uma canção levada pelo vento.

A janela do comboio desenha, alisada
pelo gelo e o fogo, as ermas paisagens
conhecidas
(ao longe, vê, a cinza e o sangue novo do
crepúsculo).

Alma, era este o mundo, a imagem que retenho,
ao inspirar, nos meus brônquios. Quando o ar
se evadir da minha boca sei que perdi tudo,
é outro o mundo e sou eu, crê-me, a sua
testemunha.

Nada nos resta senão lembrar as coisas tocadas
e suprimidas nesse mapa de ausência
compassiva:
Praga, Hamburgo, Leipzig, Viena, essa obscura
zona biográfica onde largámos o passado
e perdemos a pauta dos horários futuros.

© 1991, Paulo Teixeira
From: *Inventário e despedida*
Publisher: Caminho, Lisboa

De Temporum Fine Comoedia

1

You loom in the doorway with your waxen face,
flamboyantly clutching your necklace
like a shield against one more suburban joke.
“Rehearsing for the museum?” I thought to
shoot.

The order of the day is to retreat in haste
and to salute everything with a last hurrah.
Drums are rolling, dear, as in olden times, drunk
with blood, calling us to the sacrificial rite.
There’s something ancestral and terrifying
about the face the television promises, look,

in the middle of its ominous harangue.
No comment. We don’t have kneeling pads
at home, and if you lean out to the umbrellas
along
the shore, we know security is your preferred
dream.
You go to the balcony as an eyewitness of the
fires
inevitably blazing in the distance.

I see how fear chisels in you a statue
with veiled gaze and a speechless,
expressionless face, withdrawn into you,
the most recondite hiding place of all.

2

Together now, happy if we hear a racket
in the distance, we look at each other,
for the promise is fulfilled, the ritual
sacrament conferred on us by time.

What should we do, you ask. Hoist the sails
or dig a mine shaft in the floor, deserting
who we are as we descend time’s tunnel
to reach the world’s antipodes?
Swallow a pill or let ourselves go,
pushed by the wind, beneath the eaves?

You cannot, in a final rapture, take anything.
You’ll be the prey, on that crucial day,
of all you desired and lose, without appeal,

De Temporum Fine Comoedia

1

Assomas no arco da porta com teu rosto de cera
e seguras o colar num gesto extravagante,
defendida de mais uma piada suburbana.
“Espera-te o museu”, ia dizer, numa derrisão
fatal.

A palavra é recolher sem perda de tempo
e tudo receber com uma última aclamação.
Rufam tambores, querida, como nos tempos
antigos, ébrios de sangue, chamando-nos
à cerimónia sacrificial. O rosto que nos promete
o televisor, vê, tem algo de ancestral e terrífico

quando o vemos a meio da fatídica arenga.
Mutismo. Em casa não temos almofada de
joelhos
e a segurança, já o sabemos, é o teu sonho
preferido,
se te debruças para os toldos e a linha da água.
Vais até à varanda como testemunha ocular dos
fogos
que se acendem, inelutavelmente, na distância.

Vejo como o medo em ti cinzela uma estátua
de olhar velado e face muda, inexpressiva,
recolhida, como estás, dentro de ti,
ao esconderijo mais abstruso de todos.

2

Chegados um ao outro, felizes se ouvimos
um ruído clamoroso na distância, olhamo-nos,
pois cumprida é a promessa, o sacramento
de ordem com que fomos investidos pelo
tempo.

Que fazer, perguntas. Içar o velame
ou escavar em casa a galeria de mina,
desertando os dois, por um fuso horário,
na descida para os antípodas do mundo?
Tomar um revulsivo ou deixarmo-nos ir,
movidos pelo vento, sob a aba dos telhados?

Nada poderás levar, num último arrebatamento.
Tu mesma serás presa, na tarde momentosa,

under mob rule or some praetorian
order, sentenced to biblical logic
and the resignation of Roman existence.

All you have today is your face's imitation
in the mirror. And that's all you'll have to
defend
in the hour when God's creation rebels (and
beyond
your gaze – look! – there's still the whole
world . . .).

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Deus Absconditus

God is for you an inscrutable dream
behind the simulated window
in which you've hidden the sky.

Exposed to His predatory stare,
you've withdrawn from Him like creatures that
sleep
among branches that shake, remembering the
wind.

Hanging from the lives of saints,
He was evicted from the space you inhabit.
He even wavers in the face He shows.

God the flip side of all things,
a patience exactly equal to your age,
blindly ranges over Hades, swaying

in his hazy groping, anxious to stake out
territory,
His chest sunken from having coughed out the
universe
and His hands grabbing stars by the fistful.

God-the-dregs-of-Himself, at day's end:
a wound opened by the fury of lawless beasts
and the dampers of belching chimneys.

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de quando foi desejo teu e perdes sem apelo
sob a lei da plebe ou uma qualquer ordem
pretoriana, sentenciada ao motivo bíblico
e à resignação de uma existência romana.

Hoje tens só a imitação do teu rosto
no espelho. E nada mais te cumpre defender
à hora de sublevarem-se as obras de Deus
(além do olhar, vê, tens ainda o mundo
inteiro . . .).

© 1997, Paulo Teixeira
From: *As esperas e outros poemas*
Publisher: Caminho, Lisboa

Deus Absconditus

Deus é para vós um sonho incompreensível,
atrás da janela simulada
em que vos esconde o céu.

Expostos ao Seu olhar de rapina,
dele vos ausentastes como quem dorme
entre ramos que se movem numa lembrança de
vento.

Dependurado na vida dos santos,
evacuado foi do espaço que habitais.
Vacila na ostensão própria de um rosto.

Deus do avesso de todas as coisas,
uma paciência do tamanho da vossa idade,
passeia às cegas sobre o Hades, embalado

num tentar difuso, numa ânsia de marcar
fronteiras,
peito chato de quem tossiu o universo
e as estrelas recolhe no punho, às mãos-cheias.

Deus-despojo-de-si-mesmo, pela tarde:
chaga aberta à fúria das bestas proscritas
e ao registo de fumo das chaminés.

© 1994, Paulo Teixeira
From: *Patmos*
Publisher: Caminho, Lisboa

Elegy

Our homes don't lodge the future. It gets lost among the trees and midnight. Naked like a sprawling province past the trench of windows, it speaks of today's tarnished gold and of the meaning won in things lost, which, chewing on time's passage, hold up against grief the conduit of our lives.

We remember childhood's tiny oracles, the dreams filed away in memory's dark archives, when in the buzzing silence we plumb the past's evasive soul. We seek in yesterday a compensation, knowing there's no other man for the man of this place,

no cleaner blood flowing in the flesh of the just born, his true pastoral death. It's time for the harvest, for the far-off portents heralded by autumn's trumpets. Words, the trembling branches of words, sense the spirit of revelation in each thing.

We weep the final feast of these moments, days of a faithful fog cover our steps, veiling these hands that long to climb to heaven like stairs. If I knew the simple language of tribute, I'd sing the foreseeable fall in time for the poem to end as an elegy.

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Elegia

O futuro não o guardamos em casa, perde-se disperso entre a meia-noite e a folhagem. Nu, exposto como uma província além da trincheira das janelas, fala-nos do ouro puído destes dias, desse sentido ganho nas coisas que se perdem, salivando a passagem das horas, sustendo contra a dor o dreno das nossas vidas.

Lembramos os pequenos oráculos da infância, os sonhos que são memórias já na sua escura torre do tombo, ao intimarmos, no sossego povoado, a evasiva alma do passado. Buscamos no ontem uma recompensa, sabendo que não há outro homem para o homem deste lugar,

sangue mais limpo correndo pela carne de quem nasce, a sua genuína morte pastoral. Eis chegado o tempo da ceifa, dos presságios de longe trazidos no rumor das trompas outonais.

As palavras, os trémulos ramos das palavras, presentem o espírito da revelação em cada coisa.

Assim choramos a festa última dos instantes, dias de uma neblina fiel cobrem-nos os passos, obscurecendo essas mãos que gostariam de subir ao céu como escadas. Se conhecesse a linguagem fácil do tributo cantaria a queda adivinhada a tempo de o poema terminar na forma de uma elegia.

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From: *Inventário e despedida*
Publisher: Caminho, Lisboa

Fulget Crucis Mysterium

These are the house's cards. The hoisted sails
depart over the vast shield of waters,
writing the joys of an indifferent world.
No joy is lost that's been engraved in the
wrinkles
of an unsuspecting face, the perfect reflection
of a body alert to the audacity of stars on high,
to the brief indulgences of love and innocence:
exhausted, the body awaits the cross (nails,
thorns)
that ascends it by the rivers of lusty flesh.

Write, earnest singer, the text of total
privation, love, in this air too heavy to breathe:
sculptures of human lava like far islands
of smoke, in thirsty and impoverished tropics.
Depart over the ocean's open consonants,
reinventing
the hearty laugh, the good omen, the blue
world.

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Laudator Temporis Acti

Chafed because she breathes a noxious air,
Europe, wallowing in baths and banquets,
addicted to rhetoric and taunts in homage
to Aretino, continues to venerate
millenary statues of Hermes and Diana,
carved-wood Christs and sensual Madonnas
without fearing in the least
the old conspiracy of plague and hunger
which so often brought her down.

Delighting in the view of her domains,

Fulget Crucis Mysterium

Estas são as cartas de casa. Soltas as velas
que partem sobre o grande escudo das águas
a escrever as alegrias do mundo indiferente.
Nada se perde dessa alegria gravada nas rugas
de um rosto desprevenido. A visão perfeita
de um corpo atento à ousadia das estrelas no
alto,
às breves complacências do amor e da
inocência:
espera, exausto, o corpo a cruz que lhe sobe
(pregos, espinhos) pelos rios da carne venal.

O texto da privação absoluta escreve, o amor,
sob o ar irrespirável, ó diligente cantor:
esculturas de lava humana como ilhas de fumo
na distância, sob trópicos da penúria e da sede.
Parte sobre as consoantes abertas do oceano a
inventar
de novo o riso fácil, o bom presságio, o mundo
azul.

From: *Conhecimento do Apocalipse*
Publisher: Caminho, Lisboa

Laudator Temporis Acti

Entregue a verbenas e banhos, a Europa,
agastada porque respira um ar nocivo,
entre o hábito da retórica e apodos
em honra de Aretino, vai adorando
estátuas milenares a Hermes e Diana,
Cristos em talha, sensuais Madonnas,
sem nada recear,
o velho conciliábulo entre fome e peste
que a levou tantas vezes à submissão.

Deleitada à vista dos seus domínios

like the lord of a castle's battlements,
she runs her eyes over the smooth plains
noting, over here, a Franciscan monastery
with its vow of poverty dotting the landscape
and, other there, a cathedral where angels
trapped in stone, perfectly still,
cast their frozen gaze to what, below,
perishes or shrinks in fatality and impenitence.

© Translation: 1997, Richard Zenith

Rosary

My lips tell the lament of your distant voice,
a medal I wear on my chest, not forgotten
by the snow that wafts in my soul under a sky
dripping its light of melted wax.

Body raised on the cross, without eyes
for the last tear, hands travel over
the white stone of your face and linger
before your lips, the silence.

Smoke and whistles of farewell dig tunnels
in the landscape. I look at the lamplight hanging
over the Neva, the river's eternal fog, and I sing
a penny of life under the alamo, by the prison
walls.

Summer doesn't enter the book of memories
of your face, my son who flies through
windows;
your life is lost like an icon
in its frame. It's not I who still awaits you,

conserving the warmth of your hands in mine;
madness inscribes in verse the delirium
of dreaming you, a shadow breathed by the
afternoon
when the wind blows in Tsarskoie Selo.

In my eyelids sinks the world,
a tear. To the flesh streaked by light

como senhor das ameias de um castelo
derrama o olhar pela lisura das planícies
assinalando, aqui, um mosteiro franciscano
com o seu voto de abstinência na paisagem,
ali, uma catedral onde anjos se imobilizam
na pedra, sem gestos,
e dirigem uma atenção gelada ao que, em baixo,
perece ou se contrai em fatalidade e
impenitência.

© 1994, Paulo Teixeira

From: *O rapto de Europa*

Publisher: Caminho, Lisboa

Rosário

Soluça ao longe a tua voz, na minha boca,
a medalha que trago ao peito, não a esquece
a neve, o frio que vai na alma, sob um céu
que escorre a sua luz de cera derretida.

Corpo erguido para a cruz, sem olhos
para a lágrima derradeira, passeiam as mãos
pela branca pedra do teu rosto e quedam-se
ante os teus lábios, o silêncio.

O fumo, as sirenes do adeus escavam túneis
na paisagem. Olho a lanterna imóvel sobre o
Neva,
a névoa eterna sobre o rio, e canto um cêntimo
de vida sob o álamo, junto aos muros da prisão.

Não conhece verão o livro de lembranças
do teu rosto, filho meu em voo pelas janelas,
perde-se como um ícone na moldura
a tua vida. Não sou eu já quem te espera,

sustendo nas minhas o calor das tuas mãos:
a loucura escreve num verso o vão delírio
de sonhar-te, tu, sombra, murmurada pela tarde
quando passa o vento em Tsarskoie Selo.

Naufraga nas minhas pálpebras o mundo,
uma lágrima. A essa carne raiada na morgue
pela luz leio a fiada de contas do poema.
A memória é a casa que me deixaste, na Sibéria.

in the morgue I recite the beads of my poem.
Memory is the house you left me, in Siberia.

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The Children

These children wouldn't have wanted to be born.
They skate over the ice deep into the woods,
calling up miracles with their gaze, seeking
a face in the dim light of cafés. Each finger
is a talisman protecting them from the moon's
phase

and from the toll of bells in the high tower.
Alone, they're old like the hours of a clock dial.
With their voice they disclose another power,
invisible but suggested by shadows and fear,
the city at night hanging in their arms.

© Translation: 1997, Richard Zenith

The Last Roman Poet

As waves break over the beaches
and cannons boom beyond the city walls,
he asks for one fleeting, indulgent hour
in an inviolable place,
shielded by the muse's wings and the sibyl's
words
like an actor gone backstage.

Forgetting the dream of a laurel-crowned head
and the couches that cradle the last Epicurean
souls,
he longs only for adverbial quiet – not a sound
–
in which all might be preserved, in the ambit of
his art,
with the lightness of a quill passing over paper.

© 1991, Paulo Teixeira
From: *Inventário e despedida*
Publisher: Caminho, Lisboa

As crianças

São crianças que não gostariam de ter nascido.
Patinam sobre o gelo até ao fundo do bosque,
convocando milagres com o olhar, buscando
um rosto na baça luz dos cafés. Cada dedo
é um amuleto a guardá-las do quarto da lua

ou do rebate dos sinos no alto da torre.
Sós, são velhas como as horas no quadrante.
Denunciam com a voz um outro poder,
invisível, sugerido pelas sombras e o medo,
a cidade à noite suspensa de seus braços.

© 1997, Paulo Teixeira
From: *As esperas e outros poemas*
Publisher: Caminho, Lisboa

O último poeta romano

Enquanto rebentam as ondas junto às praias,
e há troar de canhões além dos muros da cidade,
queria o direito a uma hora indulgente e fugaz,
num espaço inviolável,
guardado pelas asas da musa e os provérbios da
sibila
como o actor recolhido aos bastidores do teatro.

Esquecidos os sonhos da cabeça adornada por
folhas de louro
ou os canapés onde se alongam as últimas almas
epicuristas,
num sossego adverbial, em que nada mais
ouve, tudo ele pudesse guardar, no âmbito da sua arte,
com a leveza que deixa a pluma ao roçar o
papel.

That each word, purified, rolling on the tongue
like a host, might have the authority of a
garland
or royal seal
and press the world he knew into a hedge
as everything degenerates and collapses around
him.

In this work of falconry applied to time past,
writing reminds him of the notches the prisoner
cuts in the wall of his cell to count the days,
knowing what will come: the slipknot of the
gallows
or a shot fired straight into his brain.

Aware that all his work will now suffer
dispersion,
he wants to save, consoling and sufficient,
a word on the face of a future stele.

© Translation: 1997, Richard Zenith

Purificada, ao salivá-la como hóstia sob a
língua,
cada palavra tivesse a autoridade da grinalda
ou do selo real
e estreitasse numa sebe o mundo que conheceu,
enquanto tudo se gentiliza e desmorona à sua
volta.

Nesse trabalho de falcoaria sobre o tempo ido,
escrever lembra-lhe os cortes feitos pela
navalha
do prisioneiro na parede da cela, contando os
dias,
certo de esperá-lo o nó corrediço da forca
ou o tiro disparado de frente sobre o crânio.

Sabendo todo o seu trabalho entregue nessa
hora
à dispersão,
deseja salvar, consoladora e suficiente,
palavra sua na face de uma estela futura.

© 1997, Paulo Teixeira
From: *As esperas e outros poemas*
Publisher: Caminho, Lisboa

ARTICLES

Gravitas Poetica in the Work of Paulo Teixeira

January 18, 2006

Paulo Teixeira's poetry is unique in the Portuguese panorama for being intensely concerned with Europe's history and destiny. Teixeira, as this article explains, isn't exactly despairing, but he's not especially optimistic either. His poems, often melancholy in tone, continually question whether the world has made any real progress.

The relatively frequent use of Latin in the titles of Paulo Teixeira's poems is an immediate tip-off that we're dealing with the serious business of Western Civilization, which, to be sure, is in trouble. The barbarians – Hitler, Stalinism, American and other imperialisms, the capitalist imperative – have razed history and our sense of belonging, the assumptions on which our cultural values and

human dignity were founded. At mid-century in the heart of Europe, many people were left with only a “memory of things touched/ and deleted on the map of poignant absence” (in ‘Biographical Zone’), but even those of us who escaped the gas chambers, the gulags, and Yugoslavian nationality, have become exiles in our own lands, being left with language, with Latin –poetry, declaration, inquiry, song – as our refuge and tenuous means of salvation. The future is in the past, time itself having been pillaged of meaning. Adam will be “the guest/ of honor at the grand finale of everything.”

Latin is not a dead language, just a displaced one. A remarkable survivor, it had a dynamic written life for over a thousand years after its cultural and historical cradle had been made into firewood, and even today it actively contributes to our spoken languages, being a privileged source for new vocabulary. Latin, which is memory, renews the present. But how far and deep can this renewal reach?

The notion of progress has been rather cruelly mocked by the violence and repetitiveness of historical events. We’ve learned all too well that today’s problems are ‘renewed’ versions of yesterday’s. This is also the meaning of the Latin titles, and of the historical stage sets created for certain other poems. ‘The Last Roman Poet’, with the appearance of an anachronistic bullet, suggests that nothing much has changed in one and a half millennia. Now, as then, poetry is like “the notches the prisoner/ cuts in the wall of his cell to count the days” – a pastime, in other words, with little or no power to influence the world. But maybe it can be a useful end in itself, a salvation for those who practice it, a Latin in our exile. There is no clear way out of our grimly cyclical history, but the poet’s duty (in ‘Fulget Crucis Mysterium’) is to sing “the text of total/ privation, love, in this air too heavy to breathe,” on the hope of “reinventing/ the hearty laugh, the good omen, the blue world.”

Latin also recalls the Church, or what used to be the Church, and the Christian God, who some say is dead, though such a large and intangible reality never dies: it merely suffers displacement and/or is transformed. God is hidden (in ‘Deus Absconditus’), because we have withdrawn from him, we have evicted him. Or because we created a God that was too inhuman, “the flip side of all things.” Or because, on the contrary, we awkwardly tried to bring what can never be more than “an inscrutable dream” into the realm of human apperception. Whatever the case, our God could not withstand the “lawless beasts” and “belching chimneys” that graced the pages of twentieth-century history. We must change our life – our communal, historical life – and we must change our God. Rilkean angels won’t do the trick. And maybe nothing else will either.

I could attempt to place Paulo Teixeira’s work in the context of recent Portuguese poetry, but it would be a forced effort, and arbitrary. In the face of an apocalypse, and this is what his poetry confronts, national distinctions count for little. Teixeira’s poetic locus is Europe – geographically, conceptually, culturally, historically and philosophically speaking – and though his poetry denotes a wide breadth of reading in Portuguese and European poetry, his style is hard to trace. At the risk of belaboring the Latin metaphor, I have to say that this poet’s syntax has a compact, almost cramped quality reminiscent of Horace’s language, and the quality is extremely appropriate in the many poems that depict stuffy, oppressive atmospheres.

In the current landscape of European and American poetry, Teixeira’s work is unusual (and, I think, refreshing) for not being about Paulo Teixeira. As in Cavafy’s poetry, his narrators called ‘I’ are fictional and historical personas. (Anna Akhmatova is the speaker in ‘Rosary’, Franz Werfel in ‘Biographical Zone’.) This impersonal quality has an important Portuguese precedent in Fernando Pessoa, whose many masks were, however, all ways of exploring or enlarging himself. The same

holds true for many of Cavafy's fictional voices. Sometimes I have wondered what would result if Teixeira, without losing any of his detachment and *gravitas*, shifted focus, not to his biographical existence but to the inner world that Pessoa, for lack of a better term, called his soul. I have also wondered if this soul isn't, like Rilke's angels, a trick: a way to avoid addressing the issue of our common human destiny. Teixeira has so far showed no signs of relenting.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

Links

Paulo Teixeira on [Lyrikline](#)