



RUI LAGE

(Portugal, 1975)

[Friday 1 May 2009]

Rui Lage was born in 1975 in Oporto, where he now lives, but he has spent long periods in the province of Trás-os-Montes, where his parents are from. This remote region of northeast Portugal is assiduously present in his most recent poetry, not so as to play out the traditional opposition between frenetic city life and the peaceful delights of rural existence, but to contrast the anodyne and often parochial modernity of the wealthier, densely populated coast with the abandoned northeast province that even the Portuguese don't know, unless as tourists. Lage's poetry has a strongly ethical dimension, and even a political one, if we consider it a task of politics to give back physical and human meaning to a territory whose various parts – both urban and rural – once constituted a self-respecting nation.

Having taken a degree in Portuguese and English, specialising in Portuguese and Brazilian literature, Rui Lage is now finishing his doctoral dissertation, entitled (with a wink at Milton) *Farewell, Happy Fields: loss, mourning and disillusion in 20th-century Portuguese poetry*, an understandable theme for a poet whose tone is clearly elegiac.

In addition to producing four volumes of poetry, a play and other texts, Lage has translated Pablo Neruda's *Crepusculario*, an anthology of poems by Paul Auster and the novella *III Seen III Said* by Samuel Beckett. He also founded and edited the literary review *aguasfurtadas*, whose most curious feature was the inclusion, in each issue, of a CD with unpublished works by young contemporary Portuguese composers. He is the co-author of a massive anthology of Portuguese lyric poetry (forthcoming), whose 2,000 pages will encompass some 300 poets, from the 12th century to the present.

Lage had his début as a poet in 2002, with the publication of *Antigo e Primeiro* (Ancient and First), a deliciously anachronistic book of sonnets. This was followed in 2004 by *Berçário* (Cradle), likewise off the track beaten by current Portuguese poetry. *Revólver* (Handgun) (2006) represents a qualitative advance over the previous books, and while it has more in common with the work of Lage's poetic contemporaries,

touching on diverse aspects of contemporary urban culture and citing films and books, he still retains some of his stylistic eccentricity. And he continues to distinguish himself for what we might call his ‘ancient’ attention to the world of nature. We could almost speak of an “ethics of attention” in his poetry. In his latest book, *Corvo* (Raven) (2008), this approximation to the things of the earth is achieved by cutting a path through the thick undergrowth of literary rhetoric that has for so long obscured them.

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POEMS

HANDGUN

THE FATE OF CLOTHES

WHAT THE WIND HAS TO SAY

WONG KAR-WAI

YOUNG WOMAN IN A COUNTRY CHAPEL

HANDGUN

Thanks for the memento, granddad:
you left me your handgun.
The trigger’s bent,
the barrel’s rusty,
and the job, with bullets of this caliber,
isn’t a sure thing
(you didn’t have to buy it from the gypsy
you used to drink with),
but no child will be able to spoil
the pessimism of this poem,
or arrive in time to avert its conclusion
– laughing, for instance, on the playground at
school.

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REVÓLVER

Agradeço-te a lembrança, avô:
deixaste-me o revólver na mão,
está empenado o gatilho,
tem ferrugem o cão,
o serviço, com balas deste calibre,
não é garantido
(escusavas de o ter comprado ao cigano
que bebia contigo),
mas criança alguma poderá estragar
o pessimismo deste poema,
ou vir a tempo de evitar o seu desfecho
– rindo, por exemplo, no recreio da escola.

© 2006, Rui Lage

From: *Revólver*

Publisher: Quasi, V. N. Famalicão

THE FATE OF CLOTHES

In the laundry hamper
of any bedroom in the world
a mother would recognize them.

They endured the inroads of time,
the onslaughts of garbage,
the ravage of a first love,
the rips of a first quarrel,
stains from fruit,
the rose's thorns,
the rose of love,

the bitter vomit of Saturday night,
the blood of a friend in the totalled car.

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WHAT THE WIND HAS TO SAY

People pass by you, stretched out
in the morgue, as if you'd never
shed a tear or cracked a smile
or been afraid or lost a job
or returned home drenched by the rain
with blank ink on your fingers grasping
the newspaper.

As if you were mere wind
ruffling the flowers on garden walls,
bending the trees,
making the laundry wave on the balcony
and the plastic bag flit down the street:
a voice that says nothing
but speaks of all things in all places.

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O DESTINO DAS ROUPAS

No cesto da roupa suja
de qualquer quarto do mundo
uma mãe saberia reconhecê-las.

Suportaram as investidas do tempo,
as agressões do lixo,
os estragos do primeiro amor
os rasgos da primeira contenda,
as nódoas da fruta,
os espinhos da rosa,
a rosa do amor,

o vômito amargo de sábado à noite,
o sangue do amigo no carro desfeito.

© 2006, Rui Lage

From: *Revólver*

Publisher: Quasi, V. N. Famalicão

O QUE DIZ O VENTO

Estás deitado na morgue,
passam por ti como se jamais tivesses
vertido uma lágrima ou esboçado um sorriso
ou sentido medo ou perdido um emprego
ou entrado em casa molhado pela chuva
com tinta preta nos dedos fechados
sobre o jornal.

Como se não passasses de vento
agitando as flores nos muros,
inclinando as árvores,
fazendo voar a roupa estendida na varanda,
o saco de plástico na calçada:
uma voz que não diz nada
mas fala de tudo em toda a parte.

© 2006, Rui Lage

From: *Revólver*

Publisher: Quasi, V. N. Famalicão

WONG KAR-WAI

As if I asked your
name, and an echo of me
answered
that you don't exist

and yet I still felt
like dying on your doorstep.

As if in the back of a cab
you weren't riding with me towards death
nor resting in my lap
your head,
lipstick glowing on your white face
and the blue of your eyes like a mirror
leaning across the night
or like a ship light asking for land
but passing by in the offing.

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WONG KAR-WAI

Como se perguntasse o teu
nome, e um eco de mim
respondesse
que não existes

e me apetecesse morrer
mesmo assim à tua porta.

Como se no banco de trás de um táxi
não seguisses comigo para a morte,
nem tivesses no meu colo pousada
a tua cabeça,
no teu rosto branco o batom aceso,
e o azul dos olhos como um espelho
debruçado sobre a noite
ou luz de navio perguntando por terra
mas passando ao largo.

© 2006, Rui Lage

From: *Revólver*

Publisher: Quasi, V. N. Famalicão

YOUNG WOMAN IN A COUNTRY CHAPEL

Seated in a pew near the wall,
dark and fertile like tilled earth,
her eyes nodding off in the incense
that grabbed her waist
and brought her the early
morning's weariness.

Her black hair probing the cold
that came in through the door
someone left open,
with its view of the distant river
and the orange tree stripped
by the frost.

JOVEM MULHER NUMA CAPELA DE ALDEIA

Num banco junto à parede,
fértil e escura como terra lavrada,
os olhos adormecendo no incenso
que a tomava pela cintura
e lhe dava o cansaço
da madrugada.

Os cabelos negros enredando o frio
que vinha de fora
pela porta que alguém esquecera aberta
mostrando ao fundo o rio
e a laranjeira despida
pela geada.

Death
on both sides of the door
giving entry
and suddenly the day
and then
nothing more.

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Morte
em ambos os lados da porta
dando entrada
e súbito o dia
e depois
mais nada.

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From: *Corvo*

Publisher: Quasi, V. N. Famalicão

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Corvo, Quasi, V. N. Famalicão, 2008

Links (in Portuguese)

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