



# RUI PIRES CABRAL

(Portugal, 1967)

[Wednesday 1 August 2007]

**Rui Pires Cabral was born in a small city in northeastern Portugal. He lives in Lisbon, where he works as a translator. He graduated from University with a degree in History, specializing in archeology. His biographical journey, of which the poems offer us glimpses, is similar to that of many other young people of his generation who left the countryside to study in Oporto or Lisbon, living in rented rooms, hanging out in bars and discotheques, going to concerts, smoking joints, falling in love, making friends, reading books, and traveling around Europe. This was a generation which entered university during the second half of the eighties, when the euphoria of those years following the 1974 revolution had long since dissipated and Portugal, in spite of its lower standard of living and the scarcity of cultural life, was beginning, for the better or worse, to seem a bit more like the other European countries.**

When Rui Pires Cabral published *Música Antológica & Onze Cidades* in 1997, the book quickly became a small cult object for many younger readers, and it would open the way for certain poets who would make their debut a bit later and whose works shared some of the characteristics of Cabral's poetry: namely the ability to make poems out of the small circumstances of daily life, ostensible subjectivity, urban experience as a principal topic, the use of a register that was more typical of prose – and adequate to an equally prosaic world – but very much in the service of lyrical intensity, the influence of American and English poetry and of some of the new lyric poetry out of Spain, the presence of 'Pop' music, a resistance to metaphor, and investment in a kind of poetry that, without abdicating a sophisticated and highly controlled prosody, wanted to be understandable to the common reader.

Rui Pires Cabral's real subject is himself: his feelings, his reflections, his personal life and the memory of his early adulthood years. And because people are not linear, the pathos in these poems is variable. What

dominates above all is the feeling of loss and the notion that the fleeting intensity of certain privileged moments is poisoned by the inexorability and absurdity of an ending towards which everything moves. But there are poems in which the gloom lifts and the poet almost believes that numbing reality still holds out some promises.

Many of his texts evoke foreign cities, usually focusing on small details, though they are not actually poems 'about' cities. They are poems about the effects, on the author, of being and of having been in them. The end of 'Restaurante Polaco', translated here, offers us a good entry into the world of Rui Pires Cabral: "... In foreign cities/ we make better use of our senses, we are bolder/ in our intuitions. And after the soup and the warm/ tea, going out into the street, we can discover/ that we are still alive and that, after all,/ we have never known any other condition./ This is the hour that reveals us. / And what we call reality/ heads off with us in the same direction."

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## POEMS

**CITY OF THE MISSING**  
**LOST FRIENDS**  
**OUR TURN**  
**POLISH RESTAURANT**  
**THIS WAY OUT**

### CITY OF THE MISSING

There were lots of times I didn't love Lisbon,  
didn't know how to love her at dusk  
on a working day, when she was used up,  
slow and dirty, and  
the deep-set sorrow of the world,  
my first and most  
precocious intuition, traveled,  
lights on, in the almost empty buses. Great city  
of the missing, so often I didn't have  
the vigor to take pleasure in  
your small, deserted  
gardens. When in the cafes  
they were already disconnecting the coffee  
machines

### CIDADE DOS DESAPARECIDOS

Muitas vezes não amei Lisboa,  
não soube amá-la ao anoitecer  
dos dias úteis, quando era gasta,  
parada e suja, e nos autocarros  
quase vazios viajava de luz acesa  
a entranhada tristeza do mundo  
que foi a minha primeira e mais  
precoce intuição. Grande cidade  
dos desaparecidos, eu não tive  
tantas vezes a saúde de gostar  
dos teus pequenos jardins  
abandonados. Quando nos cafés  
já iam desligando as máquinas  
e do outro lado da linha ninguém

and from the other end of the line no one  
would ever answer  
the way I wanted, how often  
did I fail to find the place and the serenity  
to forget and sleep? Even so,  
I didn't do you justice, Lisbon, when  
I complained of you: I wasn't a good example,  
I had always felt a bit uneasy in the bed of life.

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voltava jamais a responder  
como eu queria, quantas vezes  
não pude achar o sítio e o sossego  
para esquecer e dormir? Mesmo assim,  
eu não te fiz justiça, Lisboa, quando  
me queixei de ti: eu não era exemplo,  
eu sempre estranhei um pouco a cama  
da vida.

© 2005, Rui Pires Cabral  
From: *Longe da Aldeia*  
Publisher: Averno, Lisboa

## LOST FRIENDS

Friends carried off by life  
are the most difficult to appease, the most  
tyrannical. Barbarians of an unknown land,  
they sip the poison of silence and they grow  
beyond all limits in the distance, a blind eye  
to our loneliness. And to think that we were  
brothers in arms, that we dug up buried treasure  
from the same islands, from the most  
barren of books. How things turn out.  
Could all have been in vain? It seemed  
that we were destined for the same  
songs, for a more certain kind of love.  
Well, well. And we cannot even understand  
what happened.

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## AMIGOS PERDIDOS

Os amigos levados pela vida  
são os mais difíceis de aplacar, os mais  
tiranos. Bárbaros de um país desconhecido,  
bebem à taça os venenos do silêncio e crescem  
desmedidamente na distância, desentendidos  
da nossa solidão. E pensar que já fomos  
irmãos de armas, que desenterrámos tesouros  
nas mesmas ilhas, nos livros  
mais inóspitos. Como são as coisas.  
Terá sido tudo em vão? Dir-se-ia  
que estávamos predestinados às mesmas  
canções, a uma espécie mais certa de amor.  
Pois sim. Nem sequer compreendemos  
o que nos aconteceu.

© 2003, Rui Pires Cabral  
From: *Praças e Quintais*  
Publisher: Averno, Lisboa

## OUR TURN

It's the cold that cripples us on a winter Sunday, when hope is at its rarest. There are certain fixations of consciousness, things that wander about the house searching for their place

and, secretly they slip into a poem. It's envelopes from the water company, a knife smeared with butter on the table cloth, that trail we leave behind us and decipher without effort and to no advantage. It's the wait

and the delay. It's the streets so still at newscast time and the clinking of neighborhood cutlery. It's the nighttime aimlessness of memory: it's the fear of having lost, quite casually,

our turn.

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## POLISH RESTAURANT

The night is sustained by its décor like a dead man linked to his machines. Customers leaf through books, all Poles from the same block. We suddenly realize: there is something beyond words that resists deciphering. In foreign cities we make better use of our senses, we are bolder in our intuitions. And after the soup and the warm tea, going out into the street, we can discover that we are still alive and that, after all, we have never known any other condition. This is the hour that reveals us. And what we call reality heads off with us in the same direction.

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## A NOSSA VEZ

É o frio que nos tolhe ao domingo no Inverno, quando mais rareia a esperança. São certas fixações da consciência, coisas que andam pela casa à procura de um lugar

e entram clandestinas no poema. São os envelopes da companhia da água, a faca suja de manteiga na toalha, esse trilho que deixamos atrás de nós e se decifra sem esforço nem proveito. É a espera

e a demora. São as ruas sossegadas à hora do telejornal e os talheres da vizinhança a retinir. É a deriva nocturna da memória: é o medo de termos perdido sem querer

a nossa vez.

© 2005, Rui Pires Cabral  
From: *Longe da Aldeia*  
Publisher: Averno, Lisboa

## RESTAURANTE POLACO

A noite é sustentada pelos seus enfeites como um homem morto ligado às máquinas. Os clientes folheiam livros, tudo polacos do mesmo quarteirão. Percebemos de repente: há qualquer coisa acima das palavras que não se deixa decifrar. Em cidades estranhas dispomos melhor dos sentidos, somos arriscados nas nossas intuições. E depois da sopa, do chá morno, ao sair para a rua, podemos descobrir que ainda estamos vivos e que no fim de contas nunca conhecemos outra condição. Esta é a hora que nos representa. E aquilo a que chamamos realidade segue connosco na mesma direcção.

© 2003, Rui Pires Cabral  
From: *Praças e Quintais*  
Publisher: Averno, Lisboa

## THIS WAY OUT

But is there a way out? Imagine  
in insomnia the forests that grow  
at such hours in other regions, the trains  
that cross them to reach a destination  
in the future of others.

Is there a way out? Imagine  
night filled with violent cities,  
the rumbling of engines in the subways  
and rain falling on the black plastic  
of strawberry fields, all the suffering  
and uncertainty of the world.

And in the morning, look, it's a beautiful  
day. Your friends are getting up in the other  
room,  
they're heading down to the kitchen to make  
coffee.

But is there a way out?

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## THIS WAY OUT

Mas há uma saída? Imagina  
na insónia as florestas que crescem  
a essas horas noutras regiões, os comboios  
que as atravessam para alcançar um destino  
no futuro dos outros.

Há uma saída? Imagina  
a noite cheia de cidades violentas,  
o retumbar das máquinas nos subterrâneos  
e a chuva a cair no plástico negro  
dos morangais, todo o sofrimento  
e incerteza do mundo.

E de manhã, repara, está bonito  
o tempo. Os amigos acordam no quarto ao lado,  
descem à cozinha para fazer o café.

Mas há uma saída?

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*Capitais da Solidão*, The Vila Real Theatre, Vila Real, 2006

### In Spanish

*El Arte de la Pobreza. Diez Poetas Portugueses Contemporâneos*, Diputación Provincial Málaga, 2007

## **Links**

### **In Portuguese**

<http://poesiailimitada.blogspot.com/2006/01/rui-pires-cabral.html>

Biographical information, critical reading of one of the poems

<http://poesiailimitada.blogspot.com/2007/01/rui-pires-cabral-2.html>

Biographical information, critical reading of one of the poems