



RUY CINATTI

(United Kingdom, 1915-1986)

[Sunday 1 March 2009]

Ruy Cinatti was born in London but came as a child to Lisbon, where he later studied at the Agricultural Institute and published notable papers on phytogeography (the study of the distribution of plants). He also did work in meteorology. He was a great traveller, visiting in particular the far reaches of the Portuguese colonial world, such as Cape Verde, São Tomé, Príncipe and Angola. However, he fell in love with the Far East, especially the island of Timor, where he lived at different periods for several years.

At the end of World War II, he served on Timor as secretary to the Governor (Timor was a Portuguese colony at the time) and went on to become Director of Agricultural Services. Along with his professional duties, he devoted considerable time to archeological and cultural anthropological studies. In 1961, he received a doctorate in Social Anthropology and Ethnography from Oxford University.

Cinatti is a nomadic poet, always eager for departure and for a confrontation with the unknown. The very titles of his books are indicative of his far-ranging wanderlust: *We Are Not of this Earth*, *The Book of My Friend*, *The Nomad*, *Cape Verdian Chronicle*, *Memories of São Tomé and Príncipe*, *Poems from an Angolan Itinerary*, *Import-Export*, *A Timorean Sequence*, *Timorean Landscapes with Figures*, and *Timor-Love*. Both his travels and his poems reveal the particular affection he felt toward islands, especially Timor.

Cinatti's poetry is textured by ambivalence. The sea and the land are almost always a physical presence, as are flora and fauna. The sensory pleasure and richness of reality is never forgotten. Yet Cinatti's almost pagan love of the things of this world is balanced by a spiritual, mystical quest, in part influenced by a strong Catholic attachment. As for the Portuguese colonial world in which he spent so much time, he is clearly aware of the possible benefits of enlightened progress (his professional training, after all, was in science), while at the same time noting with dismay the depredations affecting the natural world and its indigenous cultures. Although he sees the Portuguese as a kind of *Homo universalis*, capable of spreading culture, he

also sees them as corrupt rulers, driven by greed, and oblivious to the living reality of otherness which they invade.

Cinatti's poetry has a dream-like quality, but sharp details keep it tied to the substantive natural world. It reveals scientific understanding along with an almost drunken immersion in the lulling luxuriance of sensual nature. In Cinatti, memory, dream and reality intermingle, while spirituality and sensuality are the two vivid poles of our mysterious experience. Poetry, for Cinatti, is "the autobiography of the poet or the nomad at his port of departure: his canticle". We readers must follow to see where his canticle may lead us.

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POEMS

AMAZEMENT

HUATO-CARBAU (1947)

MAPPING THE COURSE

PAX LUSITANICA

THE FIELDS ARE EMPTY

AMAZEMENT

What's happening inside me is a wonder.
A yes that spreads itself
until its path is lost
far off, like the fleeing
balloon of a child.
A yes of trespass,
hurled against
the stupidity of my hearing,
of my reason.
A yes which as it bursts says no to me,
with civil sensitivity.

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O ESPANTO

O que se passa em mim é um prodígio.
Um sim que se dilata
até perder o sentido
longe, como o balão
fugido da criança.
Um sim, transgredido,
arremetido
à estupidez do ouvido,
da razão.
Um sim que quando explode me diz não
com delicadeza.

© 1973, Ruy Cinatti

From: *Conversa de Rotina*

Publisher: Sociedade de Expansão Cultural, Lisbon

Huato-Carbau (1947)

An old man, a youth,
separated by chance.

Out there the breeze,
the sharpened cold.

In the light of the lamp they talked
the whole night through.

The old man, youthful.
The young man, sad.

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MAPPING THE COURSE

Those who didn't give me Love, didn't give me
anything.

I find myself standing still . . .

I look around and see

My better world unfinished.

So much time lost . . .

With what nostalgia I remember it and bless it
all:

Fields of flowers

And brambles . . .

I was a spring of life. I deliberate. I make order.

I think the future that will come.

And, dazzled, I follow the thought

That shows itself.

Those who didn't give me love, didn't give me
anything.

Banished,

Banished, I travel on.

And dream myself without a country, without a
friend.

Wittingly.

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Huato-Carbau (1947)

Um velho, um jovem,
separados pelo acaso.

Lá fora a brisa,
o frio fino.

À luz do candeeiro conversavam
a noite inteira.

O velho, jovem.

O jovem, triste.

© 1974, Ruy Cinatti

From: *Paisagens Timorenses Com Vultos*

Publisher: Pax, Braga

LINHA DE RUMO

Quem não me deu Amor, não me deu nada.

Encontro-me parado. . .

Olho em redor e vejo inacabado

O meu mundo melhor.

Tanto tempo perdido . . .

Com que saudade o lembro e o bendigo:

Campos de flores

E silvas . . .

Fonte da vida fui. Medito. Ordeno.

Penso o futuro a haver.

E sigo deslumbrado o pensamento

Que se descobre.

Quem não me deu Amor, não me deu nada.

Desterrado,

Desterrado prossigo.

E sonho-me sem Pátria e sem Amigos,

Adrede.

© 1958, Ruy Cinatti

From: *O Livro do Nómada Meu Amigo*

Publisher: Guimarães, Lisbon

PAX LUSITANICA

Well, if I remember right it was bad enough
having to give myself to Greeks and Trojans.
But to give myself to Americans, Russians,
and Chinese, arghh! not that, the Portuguese
are bad enough! Those
strutting thugs, those
tiny worms in Sunday-best all week
and then flat-broke on Sundays.
Odysseus' Greeks, well, fine, O.K., a flame
burning on the homeland's altar.
Trojans . . . there's Aeneas, pious guy,
lugging all his people on his back.
Of Portugal, nothing's said, not even the name
Da Gama.
But to give myself to Americans, Russians,
and Chinese, arghh! not that, the Portuguese
are bad enough!

I'd like to see myself among Tahitian girls,
Cunning Titiro, a seller of flutes,
living with them in soothed familiarity.
I'd like to give myself to Circe, get bewitched
in symbolic caverns
suffering no dearth of provender,
with a simulacrum, the vision of a dog fettered
by smell to the warm flesh.
Penelope has waited so long for me
she can, like Lisbon, wait a little longer.
But to give myself to Americans, Russians,
and Chinese, arghh! not that, the Portuguese
are bad enough!

My affairs in order, I'd like to see
if I've got it right.
Against Odysseus, I'd like to be a Trojan.
I'd like to have
my trip for free, an end that dignifies,
a toga, a palace . . . all that might
justify
my precarious existence
marked by treason, dread,
the pilot dead, by the dreamer, fire, an alligator
tear . . .
True, there is a Lusitanian smell . . .
I am a Roman.

PAX LUSITANICA

Ora se bem me lembro bem bastava
ter que me dar a gregos e troianos.
Mas dar-me a americanos, russos
e chineses, arre! isso não, que bem me bastam
os portugueses! Esses facínoras de pé na mão,
esses
minhocas endomingados na semana
e tesos ao domingo.
Gregos de Ulisses, vale é uma chama
acesa no altar da pátria.
Troianos . . . há Eneias, piedoso,
acartando nas costas o seu povo.
De Portugal, não se fala, nem do Gama.
Mas dar-me a americanos, russos
e chineses, arre! isso não, que bem me bastam
os portugueses!

Quero ver-me é entre tahitianas,
Titiro manhoso, vendedor de flautas
e com elas convívio amenizado.
Quero é dar-me a Circe, enfeitiçar-me
em cavernas simbólicas
onde não faltem os sobresselentes,
o simulacro, o ver de cão travado
pelo cheiro a carne quente.
Penélope esperou-me tanto tempo
que pode esperar mais, como Lisboa.
Mas dar-me a americanos, russos
e chineses, arre! isso não, que bem me bastam
os portugueses!

Acertadas as contas, quero ver
se não me engano.
Contra Ulisses, eu quero ser troiano.
Quero ter
viagem paga, um fim que dignifique,
uma toga, um palácio . . . tudo o que
justifique
minha precária existência
marcada pela traição, pelo pavor
piloto morto, pelo sonhador, pelo incêndio, pela
lágrima
de aligator . . .
Verdade, que há um cheiro lusitano . . .
Sou romano.

What I promise, I never do.
But to give myself to Americans, Russians,
and Chinese, arghh!, not that, the Portuguese
are bad enough!

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Aquilo que prometo nunca faço.
Mas dar-me a americanos, russos
e chineses, arre! isso não, que bem
me bastam os portugueses!

© 1971, Ruy Cinatti
From: *Memória Descritiva*
Publisher: Portugália, Lisbon

The fields are empty

The fields are empty
Where at another time villages used to flourish,
And echoes of tolling bells doubled back from
the hills,
Sobbing the silence of the pines.

A time of manor houses, grand tables set,
A hum of voices and early morning song.

Today the train goes whistling by and
indifferent
fingers point to the vine-draped wall:
“Over there was . . .”, but already the river
comes in sight.
The train shakes the foundations of the bridge.

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Os campos estão desertos

Os campos estão desertos
Onde outrora floresciam aldeias,
E ecos de sinos dobrando-se às colinas,
Soluçando o silêncio dos pinhais.

Tempo de solares e mesas postas,
Burburinho e cantos matinais.

Hoje silva o comboio e, indiferentes,
Dedos apontam o muro engrinaldado:
“Ali foi . . .”, mas já o rio surge.
O comboio estremece as fundações da ponte.

© 1941, Ruy Cinatti
From: *Nós Não Somos Deste Mundo*
Publisher: Cadernos de Poesia, Lisbon

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Links (in Portuguese)

<https://www.escritas.org/pt/ruy-cinatti>

Biography and poems

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Biography and bibliography