



© Pieter Vandermeer / Tineke de Lange

# RUY DUARTE DE CARVALHO

(Portugal, 1941-2010)

[Tuesday 8 May 2007]

**Ruy Duarte de Carvalho was born in Santarém, Portugal in 1941. He grew up in the south of Angola, where he accompanied his father – adventurer and elephant hunter – on trips through the Namibian desert. He later studied cinematography in London and anthropology at the École des Hautes Études (Sciences Sociales) in Paris.**

Having returned to Angola, he worked as a sheep farmer and studied traditional oral poetry in various African languages. He also devoted himself to studying, photographing and filming the desert peoples of his country and their traditions. At present he is a professor at the University of Luanda. He is also active as an anthropologist, prose writer, film maker, photographer, researcher and painter, but is best known as a poet. He is considered not only to be Angola's most prestigious poet but also one of the most important poets of the Portuguese language area, on a par with, for example, the Brazilian Ferreira Gullar or the Portuguese Nuno Júdice – both old acquaintances of Poetry.

© August Willemsen (Translated by Martin Earl)

[ Ruy Duarte de Carvalho took part in the Poetry International Festival Rotterdam 2007. This text was written on that occasion.]

## POEMS

**IN THE WORDS OF MUSURUKUTU  
PASTORAL SONG  
SALTPETER SORES  
SIGN  
THE CHILDREN  
YOU WAKE LONGING TO KNOW WHAT HAPPENED**

### IN THE WORDS OF MUSURUKUTU

They made me king to run the war  
and I invested myself  
with the blood of the race.

I lost my kingdom and the grace of peace  
in which I reigned without being elected.  
The war is lost:  
to find me now  
you have to look for the shepherd.

As a shepherd  
it makes no sense to be a king, and to be part of  
life  
is to depend on the rain  
and not the mandate.

Would that my escape  
not worry you.  
I don't run away to reign  
rather to have  
the sun once again at hand  
and the sour milk.

© Translation: 2007, Martin Earl

### FALA DE MUSURUKUTU

Rei me fizeram para governar a guerra  
e do sangue da raça  
me investi.

Perdi o reino e a graça de uma paz  
em que reinava sem ter sido eleito.  
A guerra está perdida:  
para me encontrar agora  
é procurar pastor.

Pastor que sou  
ser rei não faz sentido e estar na vida  
é depender da chuva  
e não do mando.

Que não vos dê cuidado  
a minha fuga.  
Não fujo para reinar  
porém para ter  
o sol de novo às mãos  
e o leite azedo.

© 2006, Ruy Duarte de Carvalho  
From: *Lavra (poesia reunida – 1970-2000)*  
Publisher: Cotovia, Lisbon

## PASTORAL SONG

I don't even know how to say it:

my cow is the color of dung  
like the bottom  
of a fox den

stamped down wood meal

strewn husks  
between two paddocks.  
the color of snuffed flame!

and what white spots it has:

on its face, speckles of milk  
which the girls splatter there

on its hips, the sparkling sky  
painted by the rising sun.

© Translation: 2007, Martin Earl

## SALTPETER SORES

Look at this country reducing itself to dust,  
to saltpeter sores  
and the blackened walls of the battlements  
gnawed by the vegetate  
of urine and sweat  
of virgin meat sent  
to dig splendors and grandeur  
on the other side of the ocean.

Look at the history of a lost country:  
tides of the gagged at a low ebb,  
the naïve tolerance exploited  
in flesh. Ask the sea,  
still serene, and caressing  
the same old eroded coast.

## CANÇÃO PASTORIL

eu nem sei como dizer:

a minha vaca é parda  
como o fundo  
da toca da raposa

farelo pisado

casca caída  
entre dois cercados.  
lume de fogo apagado!

e as malhas brancas que tem:

na cara pintas do leite  
que as meninas lhe aspergiram

nas ancas céu cintilante  
que o sol lhe pinta ao nascer.

© 2006, Ruy Duarte de Carvalho  
From: *Lavra (poesia reunida – 1970-2000)*  
Publisher: Cotovia, Lisbon

## CHAGAS DE SALITRE

Olha-me este país a esboroar-se  
em chagas de salitre  
e os muros, negros, dos fortes  
roídos pelo vegetar  
da urina e do suor  
da carne virgem mandada  
cavar glórias e grandeza  
do outro lado do mar.

Olha-me a história de um país perdido:  
marés vazantes de gente amordaçada  
a ingénua tolerância aproveitada  
em carne. Pergunta ao mar  
que é manso e afaga ainda  
a mesma velha costa erosionada.

Look at the square brutal buildings:  
the wharfs, people-depositories.  
Look at the rivers refitted with cadavers  
the rivers turbid with the dense flow  
of arms and mothers of my country.

Look at the churches newly restored  
on top of the ruins of a propagated faith:  
white walls of an urgent dignity  
hiding shackles for binding the heathen.

Look at the night inherited by these eyes  
and a people condemned to kneading your  
bread.  
Look, love, if you're attentive, you'll see  
a history of stone building itself  
on top of a history of death reducing itself to  
dust,  
to saltpeter sores.

© Translation: 2007, Martin Earl

Olha-me as brutas construções quadradas:  
embarcadouros, depósitos de gente.  
Olha-me os rios renovados de cadáveres  
os rios turvos do espesso deslizar  
dos braços e das mães do meu país.

Olha-me igrejas agora restauradas  
sobre ruínas de propalada fé:  
paredes brancas de um urgente brio  
escondendo ferros de amarrar gentio.

Olha-me a noite herdada nestes olhos  
e um povo condenado a amassar-te o pão.

Olha-me amor, atenta podes ver  
uma história de pedra a construir-se  
sobre uma história morta a esboroar-se  
em chagas de salitre.

© 2006, Ruy Duarte de Carvalho  
From: *Lavra (poesia reunida – 1970-2000)*  
Publisher: Cotovia, Lisbon

## SIGN

That was the year that the rains were excessive  
and mushrooms grew  
in dogs' eyes. The young bulls, looking out at  
the light from their mother's crotches, drowned  
in the mud, in the middle of the vines. The walls  
of the houses dissolved in cream and the potters  
no longer entrusted their work to God.  
Enormous measures were invented  
to protect the altar flames and the children  
started to run around naked.  
The termitaries ceased to exist and winged ants  
lost their wings. The feet of the oldest ones split  
open in sores and the breasts of virgins, as soon  
as you touched them, stuck to your fingers like  
wet ash. The lips of the birthing womens' sex  
swelled plumply like white meat and their  
bellies hung like soft fruit.  
That was the year the rain was excessive and  
the horizon ceased to exist.

## SINAL

Naquele ano a chuva foi excessiva e cresceram  
tortulhos  
nos olhos dos cães. Os vitelos, ao espreitar a luz  
pelos sexos  
das mães, afogavam-se em lama, no meio dos  
sambos. As paredes  
das casas diluíam-se em nata e os oleiros  
desistiram de encomendar  
a sua obra a Deus. Enormes cuidados foram  
inventados  
para proteger o fogo nos altares e as crianças  
adoptaram a nudez.  
As termiteiras deixaram de existir e as formigas  
aladas  
perderam as asas. Os pés dos mais-velhos  
fenderam-se em chagas  
e as mamas das virgens, mal eram tocadas,  
colavam-se aos dedos  
como cinza húmida. Os lábios dos sexos das  
mulheres paridas

It rained forever until the dogs lost all their fur and people's hair stuck out like rotten seaweed. The King of Jau got stuck to his throne and the sacred bullock's eyes grew larger, and then went blind. The seed sprouted in the granaries and then it was served up to the men, just like that, and they were infused with such vigor that their cocks grew immeasurably and they reeled about, with the things in their hands, mute with the magic.

The rain rained so much that the snakes left their snake-holes and stretched out next to sticks, raising their heads with only the greatest effort. Moss multiplied in the tureens of milk and the milk of cows turned to whey which curdled in urine. That year the rain rained so much that even the beaches grew branches and the rushing streams spawned fish and even the iron washed itself alone and diamonds started to tumble around the stones hollowed out for milling flour. The birds themselves nearly all died and the only ones that saved themselves were those with white feathers, which the distance attracted, then ate.

And the rain was good for fossils, and there were minerals that came alive and even common stones that were transmuted into flesh.

That year the rain rained so much that memory was rendered meaningless. Throats were clogged with sludge and the brows that the aged held in their hands fused with their fingers, and their arms fused to their legs and their graceful gestures smelt their bodies and the youngest children ended up glued to their mothers' breasts. Only our mouths dared to remain open and when the rain finally stopped, huge black birds flew from them and disappeared into the distance. And the drought came back and the world dried out. Now the ancient flesh has turned to dirt,

inchavam carnudos de uma carne branca e os ventres pendiam como fruta mole. Naquele ano a chuva foi excessiva e os horizontes deixaram de existir.

Choveu por muito tempo até os cães perderem todo o pêlo e as cabeleiras se destacarem como algas podres. O rei do Jau ficou colado ao trono e ao boi sagrado cresceram-lhe os olhos, que depois cegaram. As sementes grelaram nos celeiros e essa semente assim era servida aos homens e daí lhes ocorreu um tal vigor que os seus sexos cresceram desmedidos e os homens vacilaram, tendo-os nas mãos e mudos de fascínio.

A chuva choveu tanto que as serpentes saíram dos buracos e vieram alongar-se ao pé dos paus, mantendo com esforço as cabeças erguidas. Nas terrinas do leite vicejavam musgos e o leite das vacas alterou-se em soro, a coalhar na urina. Naquele ano a chuva choveu tanto que até nos areais cresceram talos e as enxurradas produziram peixe e até o ferro se lavou sozinho e os diamantes vieram rebolar nas pedras concavadas de moer farinha. As próprias aves morreram quase todas e apenas se salvaram as de penas brancas, que a distância atraiu, depois comeu.

E aquela chuva aproveitou aos fósseis e houve minerais que se animaram e até pedras comuns a transmutar-se em carne.

Naquele ano a chuva choveu tanto que a memória perdeu todo o sentido. As gargantas entupiram-se de limos e as testas que os velhos pousavam nas mãos

the fossils to stone and the branches to humus.  
And footsteps gradually polished the forms.

That year the rain rained so much  
that memory was rendered meaningless.

© Translation: 2007, Martin Earl

fundiam-se aos dedos  
e os braços às pernas e os gestos de graça  
fundiam os corpos  
e as jovens crianças ficavam coladas ao peito  
das mães.  
Só as bocas teimavam em manter-se abertas e  
quando mais tarde  
a chuva parou, das bocas saíram grossas aves  
negras  
que abalaram logo daquelas paragens. E a seca  
voltou  
e o mundo secou. A carne antiga a dar-se agora  
em terra,  
os fósseis em pedra e as ramas em húmus.  
E os passos poliram pouco a pouco as formas.

Naquele ano a chuva choveu tanto  
que a memória nunca mais teve sentido.

© 2006, Ruy Duarte de Carvalho  
From: *Lavra (poesia reunida – 1970-2000)*  
Publisher: Cotovia, Lisbon

### **The children**

The children  
loaded with their lot  
batrachian prisoners of dust and windowglass  
cover the page with the sound and color of their  
feeble smiles.

Already the circumflex of displeasure  
is burning on their faces –  
the pent up power of attentive malice.

They stare at us coldly from the bottom of the  
film –

the teeth of veiled appetite grow in them  
they jaw threats of dominion  
destroy one by one  
the flowers of age  
and cover themselves jeering  
with the itchy skins of animals.

They show their curved nails  
sharpened for the fight  
ready to attack  
with that smooth docility

As crianças  
carregadas de destino  
batráquios prisioneiros do pó e da vidraça  
alastram no papel o som e a cor dos seus débeis  
sorrisos.

Arde-lhes já na face  
o circumflexo acento do desgosto –  
a reprimida força da malícia atenta.

Miram-nos frias do fundo da película –

crescem-lhes dentes de apetite oculto  
mandibulam ameaças de domínio  
destroem uma a uma  
as flores da idade  
e cobrem-se escarninhas  
de pêlos urticantes.

Exibem unhas curvas  
afiadas para a disputa  
e denunciam intenções de assalto  
na lisa mansidão  
com que protegem a morosa espera.

they use to protect the lingering hope.

Everywhere the children go they tyrannize the place.

Possessed

they tear the children of other races to pieces – they wear their disdain in their rancorous

features

and ask

innocently

if the niggers have names.

© Translation: 2007, Martin Earl

### **You wake longing to know what happened**

You wake longing to know what happened to the garlands that your blood opened during the night. You face the morning naked and depraved like the white wall from which you tear what's left

of an old poster. The partitions of trust fall and here, right in front of you, adverse like never before, the geography, ever more tense.

You see the tongue of sand under a different light.

Memory vanished, crystallized in echoes.

The gestation of fear ruined the hours.

You practice the walk you used to know. You simply expose your skin, without the outline of your old body giving up a clue as to what's happening within.

You reinvent the implantation

of your human form in the world, for now washed of secure reasons.

To be alive and to assail the clarity implies a vocation

As crianças tiranizam o espaço que atingiram.

Possessas

dilaceram crianças de outras raças – assumem, rancorosas, o desdém na face e inquires

inocentes

se os pretos têm nome.

© 2006, Ruy Duarte de Carvalho

From: *Lavra (poesia reunida – 1970-2000)*

Publisher: Cotovia, Lisbon

Acordas ansioso por saber das grinaldas que o sangue abriu na noite. Enfrentas a manhã nua e devassa como a parede branca a que se rasga a forma de um cartaz antigo. Caíram os tapumes da confiança e eis presente, como nunca adversa, a geografia cada vez mais tensa.

Vês a língua de areia servida de outra luz.

A memória sumiu-se, cristalizou nos ecos.

A gestação do medo arruinou as horas.

Ensaias o andar antes sabido. Apenas expões a pele

sem que o contorno do teu velho corpo revele indícios do que te vai por dentro.

Reinventas no mundo

a implantação do vulto, lavado agora das razões seguras.

Estar vivo e acometer a claridade implica a vocação

de afeiçoar o corpo à praça imposta.

Há uma maneira apenas de enfrentar o frio.

É transportar, por dentro, o próprio frio. Não fere, a decisão,

for adapting the body to the imposition of the  
town square.  
There's only one way to face the cold.  
It's to bring it, the cold itself, inside you. The  
decision doesn't wound,  
not more than the decisions of others.

© Translation: 2007, Martin Earl

muito para além das decisões alheias.

© 2006, Ruy Duarte de Carvalho  
From: *Lavra (poesia reunida – 1970-2000)*  
Publisher: Cotovia, Lisbon

---

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Publications (selection):

*Chão de oferta* (1972)  
*Decisão de idade* (1976)  
*Exercícios de crueldade* (1978)  
*Sinais misteriosos... Já se vê...*(1979)  
*Ondula, savana branca* (1982)  
*Lavra paralela* (1987)  
*Hábito da terra* (1988)  
*Memória de tanta guerra* (1992, anthology)  
*Ordem de esquecimento* (1997)  
*Lavra* (2000, collected poems)