



# MANUEL GUSMÃO

(Portugal, 1945)

[Thursday 1 January 2004]

**Manuel Gusmão was born in Évora in 1945. A poet, essayist and university lecturer, he graduated in romanic philology at the Arts Faculty of Lisbon University in 1970, becoming a member of the Faculty's teaching staff the following year.**

Manuel Gusmão was elected representative of the Constituting Assembly (1975/76) and between 1984 and 1987 was a member of the Communications Council. He is a founding member of the French Literature Studies University Group (GUELF) and took part in setting up the Portuguese Association for Comparative Literature (APLC). He was also was one of the driving forces behind the magazines *Ariane* and *Dedalus*, as well as a member of the editorial board for the magazines *O Tempo e o Modo* (1968/71) and *Letras e Artes* (1969/70). Gusmão has written literary reviews for several other newspapers and literary magazines.

His debut as a poet occurred in 1990, with his book *Dois sóis, A Rosa / a arquitectura do mundo* (*Two Suns, The Rose / architecture of the world*). In 1997 he was awarded the Portuguese PEN Club Prize for the best book of poetry published the previous year, *Mapas / O Assombro A Sombra* (*Maps / The Wonder The Shadow*). His third book of poetry *Teatro do Tempo* (*Theatre of Time*), published in 2001, was awarded both the Portuguese Writer's Association Grand Prize and the 'Luís Miguel Nava' Foundation Prize. His poems have appeared in different specialist publications, such as *Di Versos* and *Hablar/Falar de poesia*. Furthermore, Gusmão wrote the libretto for the opera by António Pinho Vargas, *Os dias levantados* (the first opera to have been written about the Portuguese Revolution), which was staged at the S. Carlos National Theatre.

## POEMS

**IT'S NIGHT-TIME IN THE MORNING  
LEARN TO SPEAK (SAYS  
NO OTHER FLOWER  
THE HAND WRITES ON THE MIND : AN ARROW  
WE WILL DIE OVER AND OVER ON THIS BEACH, ON THE SHORES OF LIGHT.**

### **It's night-time in the morning:**

It's night-time in the morning:  
you get out of bed

Morning and night, forever at odds,  
instead of seeing each other in the mirror  
cause it to shatter into itself

but they hear each other in the rooms of the  
house

Suddenly there you are at the end of the hallway  
I feel for a moment your black face  
and the vastness of your nocturnal body

you hand me the morning  
slowly  
like a phosphorescent map

where we would surely die

É isto: a noite de manhã  
Tu levantas-te

Manhã e noite não se vêem ao espelho  
antes o estilhaçam para dentro  
desencontram-se interminavelmente

mas ouvem-se uma à outra entre as salas da  
casa

Tu estás súbita ali na esquina do corredor  
sinto por momentos a tua cara negra  
e a imensidão do teu corpo anoitecido

passas-me a manhã devagar  
de mão a mão  
como um mapa fosforescente

onde por certo íamos morrer

© 1996, Manuel Gusmão  
From: *Mapas / O assombro A sombra*  
Publisher: Caminho, Lisbon

### **learn to speak (says**

learn to speak (says  
the rose): write at night,  
with my multiple sun  
guiding you down countless  
paths. sit in a room  
with the light out  
and wait for another  
light from another room  
to arrive, tenuous,  
at the paper you turn  
its way. then you will speak  
of passions, of the petal  
that falls  
into the heart  
and sails  
in the blood's shadow  
past one and another  
wonder.

aprende a falar – diz  
a rosa: escreve de noite  
e que o meu múltiplo sol  
te guie inúmeros  
os caminhos. põe-te numa sala  
com a luz apagada  
onde chegue acesa  
a de uma outra, e  
frágil,  
ao papel que para ela  
voltas. Então falas  
das paixões, da pétala  
que cai no interior  
do coração  
e navega na sombra do  
sangue, de assombro em  
assombro.

© 1990, Manuel Gusmão  
From: *Dois sóis, A Rosa / a arquitectura do mundo*  
Publisher: Caminho, Lisbon

### **no other flower**

no other flower  
has the hard beauty  
of this red rock  
that rises to itself  
like a tide  
rising all a-  
round us  
a fire that rises by itself  
as in waves  
we rise

nenhuma outra flor  
tem a dura beleza  
desta rocha vermelha  
que a si mesma sobe  
como uma maré por  
todos os lados subin  
do-nos  
fogo que por si mesmo sobe  
como em ondas  
nós

© 1990, Manuel Gusmão  
From: *Dois sóis, A Rosa / a arquitectura do mundo*  
Publisher: Caminho, Lisbon

## **the hand writes on the mind : an arrow**

the hand writes on the mind : an arrow  
travelling on a piece of paper, a compass card:  
the treble clef; la clef des jardins;

the key like a child's train passing  
through a patio with a palm tree, between  
the white twilight and the red morning;

the city had grown like crests of waves  
meeting the aerial constructions of clouds;  
halfway up, shimmering triangles waved

and the murmuring earth remembered  
the roots of electric trees  
in whose branches glowed fish  
from the deep.

Not even with arrows could you inhabit such a  
land,  
so you place them into a painting that  
hallucinates  
and you draw a fairy queen: an Arabian

song an Arabian princess written in sackcloth  
and haloed with napalm; the forest under  
construction  
multiplies the full moon across the lakeside  
pilings;

the boats navigate a white night  
rising like a hill lit up  
by monstrous, odd-shaped flowers:

crosses and spirals waiting for you.

a mão escreve na mente: a flecha  
que viaja no papel a rosa dos ventos:  
a clave do sol; la clef des jardins;

a chave como um comboio de criança  
passando num pátio com palmeira, entre  
o crepúsculo branco e a manhã vermelha;

a cidade crescera como os arcos das ondas  
ao encontro das aéreas construções das nuvens;  
a meio caminho triângulos acesos ondeavam

e a terra recordava-se murmurante  
das raízes das árvores eléctricas  
em cujos ramos brilhavam os peixes  
profundos.

Nem com setas habitarias tal pátria  
e por isso as pões na pintura que delira  
e desenha uma fairy queen: um canto

árabe uma princesa árabe escrita em sarapilheira  
e aureolada pelo napalm; a floresta em  
construção  
multiplica a lua cheia pelas paliçadas lacustres;

os barcos navegam uma noite branca  
que se ergue como um monte iluminado  
por monstruosas flores irregulares

em cruz e em espiral à tua espera

© 1996, Manuel Gusmão  
From: *Mapas / O assombro A sombra*  
Publisher: Caminho, Lisbon

**we will die over and over on this beach, on  
the shores of light.**

we will die over and over on this beach, on the  
shores of light.  
the rose declines its autobiography, obliquely  
falling  
over miles and miles of unrelenting forest,  
over the shadowy architecture of this earth so  
long in love,  
over the rose that ascends to the airy metalwork  
of clouds.

morreremos repetidamente sobre esta praia, nas  
margens da luz.

A rosa declina a sua autobiografia,  
obliquamente caindo  
sobre quilómetros e quilómetros de florestas  
insistentes,  
sobre a sombria arquitectura desta terra  
longamente apaixonada,  
sobre a rosa que sobe até à aérea metalurgia das  
nuvens.

© 1990, Manuel Gusmão

From: *Dois sóis, A Rosa / a arquitectura do mundo*

Publisher: Caminho, Lisbon

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## ARTICLES

### *Critics on the work of Manuel Gusmão*

January 18, 2006

Manuel Gusmão's second book of poetry proves what we already knew: that his is one of the great names in contemporary Portuguese poetry; and that there are poems here that would be essential reading for any overview of 20th century Portuguese literature.

Only certain aspects of the author's personality (enormous discretion in relation to the media, unfailing political commitment, exemplary dedication to his university teaching and an outstanding reputation as a literary critic) have prevented the full and proper recognition of his poetic works. But a reading of the *Maps/ The Wonder The Shadow* removes any doubts or hesitations . . . This is poetry dense with cultural references, and an enormous capacity for self-reflection, but at the same time, pure, uninhibited, frugal, lilting, fluent, contagious and magical. Extremely reserved, surrounded by words on all sides, yet at the same time intensely physical, almost obscene ("fracture exposed to the dread").

Eduardo Prado Coelho

*Público*, 23 March 1996

Exceptionally long compared to the average book of poetry [...], this is, however, a body of solid “architecture”, supported by the temporality already described, by an extremely diverse network of self-quotations and references [...] as well as by a tightly sealed thematic cohesion contained within the most constant symbols — the rose, flower and colour, name of the feminine, the body, the text. [...] an intensely lyrical, intimate, secret, self-ironical voice emerges from this work, and a precision comparable to the best of those he has been most influenced by — Luiza Neto Jorge and Carlos de Oliveira. A voice that communicates with the person reading; because “The reader sets himself to writing. He writes for your — what a terrible thing; how could he? Let’s accept that this knowledge can be shared and let the reader proceed”, reading and treasuring what they have learned in this subtle and unsettling book. Essential reading.

Paula Morão

(writing about *Two Suns, The Rose/ the architecture of the world*)

*Viagens na Terra das Palavras*, 1993

We could call this a “generalised semiotics”, taking the capacity to produce meaning to its ultimate consequences, along with the total rejection of any unified voice which would allow for an unperturbed reading: from poem to poem [...] all the possibilities of meaning are gradually displaced or revoked [...]. The writing here is understood as the “construction and transformation” of the reality and not as the “representation” of an empirical, past instance; the poem affirms, constructs, engenders and meticulously gives life to things as revelation and wonder.

António Guerreiro

*Expresso*, 8 September 1990

Whereas for some poets the material of the real serves as the point of departure for mechanisms of representation, which even whilst transfiguring it, remain faithful to a reproduction of its contours that are capable of taking in its most recognisable coordinates, [...] there are others who try to act as good conductors of the energy which flows through the real itself, capturing its intensity through words which spark a continuous semantic stream, resulting in the breaking down of the habitual limits of human perception, creating in their place other ways of experiencing the real. [...] it is this atmosphere of questioning the limits of language that we find in the poetry of Manuel Gusmão, whose second collection extends and heightens what the first showed us[...].

*Românica* nº 5, 1996

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