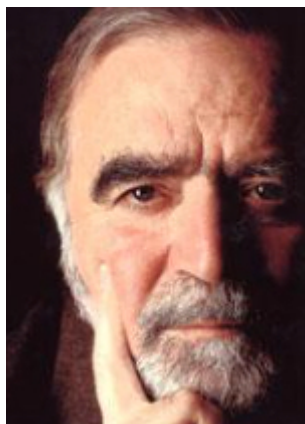


Alegre, Manuel

(1936)



Born in Águeda to a liberal and politically active family, Manuel Alegre's studies at the Faculty of Law of the University of Coimbra coincided with the academic unrest of 1962, in which he participated actively and, as a consequence, was drafted to Angola. It was there he was arrested for attempting a military revolt against the colonial war. The fictional memories of this first uprooting, wrapped up in revolt and a yearning for liberation on several fronts, would only be set to text many years later, in the novel *Jornada de África*.

Having returned to the mother land, in 1964, he set off in the same year to his exile in Paris, from which he would return after the Revolution, on May 2, 1974. During the 1960s, as a member of the board of the FPLN (Frente Patriótica de Libertação Nacional), he lived in Algeria, where he worked for several years at the Voz da Liberdade radio station, besides undertaking several travels (Germany, Czechoslovakia, Moscow....) directly connected with his political activity, briefly echoed in his heterofictional 2004 novel *Rafael*, in which Manuel Alegre revisits these times and places in a polyphonic and interlaced fashion.

Although since the end of the 1980s he has regularly published books of prose, he has mostly remained loyal to the poetic labour since 1965's *A Praça da Canção*, his debut book, published already during his exile and which, due to censorship or in spite of it, came to be circulated extensively among the opposition milieu, as did his other texts published before the 25th of April, 1974.

With an undeniably epic and interventionistic creative imagination, marked by the history of Portugal and reflecting on the collective fate of the Portuguese in the diaspora, Manuel Alegre's poetry, at the same time as it moves away from the earlier more distinctly ideological neorealist penchant, based itself on the combination of the lyrical tradition of the *Cancioneiros* with classical verse structures and constant dialogue, explicit or implicit, with

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the great names of western literature, with emphasis on Homer, Dante, Camões, Rilke...

Although the testimonial and autobiographical sides of his oeuvre (both in poetry and fiction) shine a light on different stages of the author's personal history (see, for instance, the poems *Praça da Canção*, *O Canto e as Armas*, *Babilónia*, *Chegar Aqui*, *Livro do Português Errante*; the stories from *O Homem do País Azul* or the novels *Jornada de África*, *Alma*, *Rafael...*), all these circumstances eventually become integrated into different textual forms and are progressively led towards reflection on the melancholy and the nostalgia which assail the spaces of this "português errante" ["wandering Portuguese"], not only certain that writing is a fate, but also aware of the exiled condition of literature itself.

In his active role as a speaker and even, briefly, as an essayist, as in the foray that is *Arte de Marear*, Manuel Alegre evokes a global perspective on Portuguese literature which, incidentally, allows him to be recognized in the tradition of the double or multiple exile, in which he sets a structuring dynamic, successive or even simultaneous, of "Errância e Enraizamento" ["Wandering and Taking Root"]: "Há o exílio que provoca o desenraizamento. E há o que leva à redescoberta da raiz, ao voltar a casa, ao enraizamento. Eu creio que é o caso de parte significativa da literatura portuguesa. Uma literatura marcada pela errância e pela viagem. E por várias formas de exílio" ["There is exile which causes rootlessness. And there is exile which leads to rediscovering the root, when returning home, when taking root. I believe this is the case of a significant part of Portuguese literature. A literature marked by wandering and travel. And by various forms of exile"] (2002: 27).

Travels

Portugal, France, Algeria, Czechoslovakia, USSR, Greece.

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Quotations

Georges: you who have with António Nobre gone / to my sailing country / come see in Portugal a slum / come see it in Paris with no sea or pine tree // Nanterre St. Denis Aubervilliers Champigny. / Oh rootless time / I've told you I'm not from here // In this uprooted Paris night (O Canto e as Armas in *30 Anos de Poesia*, p. 183) (translated)

There were twenty or thirty of us on the banks of the Seine. / And the eyes flowed with the waters. / They searched for the Tagus in the waters of the Seine / they searched for willows on the banks of the wind / and this country of tears and villages / placed on the twilight hills. / They searched for the sea. (idem: 190) (translated)

I shall still go to Salamina to die / Even if it is of the lost greatness / May nothing remain of ruin and turmoil / I shall still go to Salamina to die / For the sun for the light for the beauty. ["Louvor de Apolo (Viagem à Grécia: Maio 1983)" in *30 Anos de Poesia*: 550] (translated)

You shall know the beauty of the city, not exactly that of the Pont Alexander III or of the Concorde, nor that of the Champs Elysees and its lights, nor even that of its intimate squares, Place des Vosges, Place de la Contrescarpe, but the terrible and ugly beauty of its great deserted boulevards in the night, this wonder and this terror of walking with naught but the echoes of your own steps ringing in your ears, among the majesty of the stone and the silence, feeling the attraction of anonymity and of dissolution in the vastness of the night and the city. (*Rafael*: 197) (translated)

There is in the bays of great cities a despairing absence / it shines in the lights of skyscrapers reflected on the sad current / and all ships have their cosmopolitan countenance / your unexpected mien arriving from the country where you are and aren't. // In Hong Kong Amsterdam New York San Francisco / there is a kind of nostalgia a turning a wafting / maybe melancholy is your name since you / are almost arriving and as always never halting. (*Livro do Português Errante*: 65) (translated)

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