THREE WOMAN POETS FROM MOZAMBIQUE

GLÓRIA de SANT’ANNA (1925 - 2009)

- *Distância* (1951)
- *MúsicaAusente* (1954)
- *Livro de Água* (1961)
- *Poemas do Tempo Agreste* (1964)
- *Um Denso Azul Silêncio* (1965)
- *Desde que o Mundo* (1972)
- *Algures no Tempo* (2005)
- *Trinado para a Noite que Avança* (2009)

Widely regarded by some as representing one of the highest achievements in Mozambican lyricism, Glória de Sant’Anna’s work is ignored—*delenda gloria*—by many others. Six of her poetry collections were published in Mozambique. The silence which surrounds this poet seems to reflect more on the ideological and racial preconceptions of the Mozambican canon-makers (many of whom are not Mozambican) than on considerations of her unique achievement, which is not generally denied. The Portuguese likewise tend to treat her work with a similar silence, a refusal to engage in, rather a dismissal of, her work; the suggestion is that she cannot be placed within that tradition either. The poet is however held in high esteem by the Mozambican poets themselves and the lineage initiated by Glória de Sant’Anna is today one of the dominant traditions in Mozambican lyricism. A school teacher for most of her life, she worked in Porto Amélia (now called Pemba) and Vila Pery (now Chimoio). Glória de Sant’Anna, retired for many years now, lived in Óvar, Portugal.
NOÉMIA de SOUSA (1926 - 2002)

- *Sangue Negro* (2001)

Rightly considered one of Africa’s greatest women poets, Noémia de Sousa published her first poems in 1948, when she was 22. Her almost total poetic output was written in the following three years, and she did not write again until 1988, when she composed a poem on the death of Samora Machel. In 1951 she went on holiday to Lisbon and stayed. Later she moved to Paris. She returned to Portugal after the 1974 Revolution. She did not—as it has been claimed—stop writing because she married a Portuguese man. (The poet was married to a Mozambican who, like her, happened to have been a Portuguese national because he had been born in a Portuguese colony.) According to Noémia de Sousa she never really stopped writing; she was a journalist and the writing she produced after she moved to Europe was of a different nature. Her powerful poetic work, which influenced a whole generation of writers and poets, remained uncollected for almost fifty years: *Sangue Negro* came out in 2001. She died in Lisbon.

ANA MAFALDA LEITE (1956 - )

- *Em Sombra Acesa* (1984)
- *Canções de Alba* (1989)
- *Livro das Encantações* (2005)

One of those poets that canon-makers find easier to ignore than to categorize, Ana Mafalda Leite cannot be placed too firmly within either the Mozambican or Portuguese poetic traditions. It is probably more advisable to see her as belonging to both traditions, enriching both with her highly original gift. She did her schooling in Lourenço Marques (Maputo) and completed her university training in Lisbon. A teacher of Lusophone African literature—she is a professor at the University of Lisbon—her work attests also to a self-reflexive poetic reworking of that tradition.
Luís Rafael (Trad.)

a mulher que ri à vida e à morte
—1991

Para lá daquela curva
os espíritos ancestrais me esperam

Breve, muito breve
tomarei o meu lugar entre os antepassados

À terra deixarei os despojos do meu corpo inútil
as unhas córneas de todos os labores
este invólucro sulcado pela aranha dos dias

Enquanto não falo com a voz do nyanga
cada aurora é uma vitória
saúdo-a com o riso irreverente do meu secreto triunfo

Oyo, oyo, vida!

Para lá daquel curva
os espíritos ancestrais me esperam
NOÉMIA de SOUSA (1926 - 2002)

The Woman who Laughs at Life and Death
—1991

Out there beyond the swerve
the ancestral spirits await me

Soon, very soon,
I will take my place among my forebears

To the land I will leave the remnants of my useless body,
the corneous nails of all efforts,
this casing furrowed by the spider of time

Before I am called to speak with the voice of a nyanga∗
each day is a victory
I greet it with the irreverent laughter of my secret triumph

Oyo, oyo, life!

Out there beyond the swerve
the ancestral spirits await me

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i Noémia de Sousa, "AMulher que Ri à Vida e à Morte", in A Meu Vêr, ed. by Carlos Pinto Coelho (Lisboa: Pegaso Editores, 1992), p. 50.

∗ Shangaan, a traditional healer or an ancestral spirit.
GLÓRIA de SANT’ANNA (1925 - 2009)

EROTICA\(^{ii}\)
--- 2004

para o quinto livro de
Ana Mafalda

soltaram-se os camelos

a káfila
galopa sobre a areia
de beiços estendidos

salta a carga

no ar há
cardamomo  benjoim
pimenta e cânfora

transparentes kabayas
volteiam
sobre oiros e saris

canela despejada
azzaferan

junto aos corpos unidos que se afágam

soltaram-se os camelos

e tudo é poesia
que se dilue no ar
em aromas perdidos

\(^{ii}\) Glória de Sant’Anna, “Erótica,” Algures no Tempo (Óvar: n.p, 2005), pp. 31-2.
EROTICA

On the publication
of Ana Mafalda’s fifth book.

the camels broke loose

the kafila †
hurts over the sand
the mouths of the camels opened wide

the load topples over

the air’s astir with
   cardamom  benzoin
   pepper and camphor

sheer kabayas‡
swirl
over the gold and the saris

   dispersed cinnamon
   za’faran§

close to the enlaced bodies caressing each other

the camels broke loose

and poetry’s everything
that dissolves in the air
in lost aromas

* Ana Mafalda Leite’s fifth collection, Passaporte do Coração (2002). See, for example, “An Island Sails in My Soul.”
† Swahili, caravan.
‡ Malay, sarongs.
§ Arabic, saffron.
Luís Rafael (Trad.)

aromas especiarias perfumes
mãos dolentes

e os corpos unidos sobre a areia
e vêus de seda
kabayas

e os árabes
os árabes e os búzios
misturados

aos corpos já dolentes sobre a areia
soltaram-se os camelos

a káfila

galopa de beiços estendidos
espumando
e a poesia
são corpos saciados sobre a areia
especiarias
aromas
gengibres e canela

sobre os corpos despidos pela areia
aroma  spices  fragrances

doleful hands

and the bodies enlaced on the sand

the silk veils

   kabayas

and the Arabs
the Arabs and the whelks
have been joined

to the doleful bodies on the sand

the camels broke loose

the kafila hurtles

   the mouths of the camels opened wide
foaming

and poetry

is those bodies on the sand that have been satiated

spices

   aromas
ginger and cinnamon

over the bodies made naked by the sand
Luís Rafael (Trad.)

ANA MAFALDA LEITE (1956 - )

navega-me a alma uma ilha

seu corpo é vestido
de búzios e algas
e deixa na areia
rasto de prata

Gloria de Sant’Anna

navega-me a alma uma ilha
o espírito antigo de um barco em viagem

penélope de m’siro enfeitada
olha o minarete mais alto
do horizonte

e medita sobre as ruínas do cais
o porto ancorado do sonho

por entre os seus dedos deslizam

fios de missanga
fios de prata
fios de ouro

ourivesaria atenta do silencio

seu rosto voltado a oriente
o linho enrolado no corpo
navega-lhe pelos dedos
da demorada monção
o súbito vento
Three Woman Poets from Mozambique

An Island Sails in My Soul

her body is clothed
with whelks and seaweed
and it leaves behind on the sand
silver footprints

Glória de Sant’Anna

an island sails through my soul
the ancient spirit of a voyaging ship

Penelope adorned with m’siro
* gazes upon the tallest minaret
on the horizon

and on the wharf in ruins
the moored harbour of dreams
she ponders and thinks

through her fingers slide

strings with glass beads
strings of silver
strings of gold

the careful jewellery of silence

her face turned orient-wise
the linen wrapped around her body
the long-awaited monsoon
the abrupt wind
sail through her body


* A white paste that women on the Island of Mozambique put on their faces as a sign of beauty.
porque tem as mãos juntas
e desenha astrolábios
diademas colares
rosas de areia

porque tem as mãos juntas
entre seus fios
rosários de prata
corais de sonho
enfeites colares
cresce os muitos braços
os sábios guizos nos tornozelos dança

o linho ao vento seu corpo esguio
no mar ondula infinito de azuis
e perfuma o ar de múltiplas geografias

descobriu em si a amurada
o cais

penélope de m’siro enfeitada
seus cabelos refugem estreias
búzios peixes conchas pontilhadas

e lebram finas cordagens
enlaçadas de algas

o rosto sextante
as mãos navegando os fios de contas perladas
as mãos soltando essas estranhas domésticas especiarias

de m’siro enfeitada
penélope grava na areia
os brilhos ourives as sedas as cabaias os linhos
e tece seus fios seus cabelos seus seios
na púrpura turbante azul indigo
das índicas aguas

o oriente começa no seu rosto de m’siro,
açafrão, ébano e anil
búzios ondulantes navegam o ritmo de suas ancas
um barco no peito
for she holds her hands together  
and draws astrolabes  
diadems  necklaces  
roses of sand  

for she holds her hands together  
between her strings  
rosaries of silver  
corals of dreams  
ornaments  necklaces  
she grows her many arms  
she dances the wise bells on her ankles  

the wind-swept linen  her slender body  
undulates with the sea of infinite blues  
and she perfumes the air with multiple geographies  

she discovered the bulwark within herself  
the wharf  

Penelope adorned with m'siro  
her hair is resplendent with stars  
whelks  fish  spotted seashells  
and it suggests fine cordage  
entwined with seaweed  

her face a sextant  
her hands sailing through the pendants of pearly beads  
she sets her hands free with these strange homely spices  

adorned with m'siro  
Penelope records  
the sparkling jewellery the silk the kabayas\(^{13}\) the linen  
on the sand  
and she weaves her strings  her hair  her breasts  
inside the indigo-purple turban  
of the waters of the Indian Ocean  

the orient begins with her face adorned with m'siro,  
saffron, ebony and anil  
undulating whelks sail to the rhythm of her loins  
she weaves
Luís Rafael (Trad.)

por suas mãos tece
os fios de prata
os fios de ouro
os fios de sonho

rede
no coração da água
ancorada

não e por ulisses que ela aguarda
mas por um estranho destino

que o espírito das águas
levando-a ao cimo das nuvens
a oriente a ocidente
no coração da ilha há séculos
a encanta e a demora

a traz enamorada
a boat on her breast
the strings of silver
the strings of gold
the strings of dreams
fishing net
in the heart of the moored
water
it’s not for Ulysses she awaits
but for a strange destiny
that the water spirit
will take her higher still than the clouds
eastwards westwards
into the centuries-old heart of the island
and enchant her and those lingering moments

will make her enamoured of him