

Maria Miranda Lawrence. *À Janela – The Poetic Soul*. MML Livros, 2011.

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When reading *À Janela – The Poetic Soul*, one finds a collection of emotionally charged poetry, prose and short narrative alongside vividly colored pages of photography and paintings done by artist and author Maria Miranda Lawrence. Here, with the coordinative efforts of the author, well-known poets and songwriters lay out a magical journey into Portuguese history and culture.

It is a journey filled with an emotional look back into the origins of an old world country. One whose old world heritage has grown into many voices each described independently by their own country or nation. This one language is now filled with intricate hand-woven parchments of beauty from many Portuguese-speaking nations. These different parchments, serve as a metaphor for the different Portuguese cultures represented. In this work, they have been drawn together into one collective soul. This ‘poetic soul’ so richly represents a single, yet multi-layered, Portuguese voice.

Maria Miranda Lawrence was born in São Miguel, the Açores, where at a very young age she began drawing, a talent that continued on through her youth. At the age of four, the author relocated to the northwest coast of Canada with her family to be with their father who had previously moved

there for work. In grade twelve Maria Miranda received a scholarship that she then used to apply to a fine arts degree at the Kootenay School of Art, in Nelson, B.C.

As the author Maria Miranda so correctly states in the introduction of this book, *A Janela – The Poetic Soul* is a reflective opening or ‘window’ into a collective and very creative spirit of the Portuguese voice. ‘At the window’ is also symbolical of where much of daily life goes on for the traditional Portuguese people. The author begins each new chapter with a short introduction highlighting certain events or features of the lives of each artist stating certain contributions each has given to their field.

This collective work includes some of the more significant Portuguese singers and poets of the twenty first century. It is a wonderfully written culmination of the modern Portuguese voice captured in lyrical poetry and prose by each author and songwriter then brought further to life visually by the author’s photography and paintings.

Each poetic selection of narrative or poetry in this book describes an emotional voyage into certain elements of Portuguese culture correlated closely to its music, language and mythology. It combines music with poetry and artwork into one very satisfying image for the reader. The poetry, prose and narratives are written in their original Portuguese then translated into English. Many of the poems were written so lyrically that they later became famous Portuguese songs expressing a layered richness found in Portuguese culture and heritage. The poetry and prose selected for this work expresses a unique nature in the way that these women react to life’s most important struggles – one found to be very distinctive to the Portuguese culture. Distinctive in its old world charm and beauty portrayed beautifully through original artwork, lyrical poetry and narrative prose specifically selected for this collection.

The lyrical poetry and prose of twelve well-known Portuguese singers, such as Catarina Avelar, Césaria Évora, Dulce Pontes, Ana Moura, and Mariza, are included in this collection of work. The poetry and narratives selected are then visually displayed and thematically highlighted in this work by special photographs and paintings. This collaboration of writers and artists better provides the reader with a deeper emotional view into Portuguese life both

in Portugal and abroad. Showing that even though the rich Portuguese culture has spread in different geographical locations the sentiment of what it means to be Portuguese has remained the same. Each representative work is a descriptive voyage showing in some way what it means to be Portuguese. For example, when various artists use the important Portuguese concepts of ‘fado’ and ‘saudade’ in so much of their work, which shows how evident their place is in the lives of the artists as well.

Elements of nature are used in various selections to describe the artists’ views on love and life. The poetry and prose in this book show the reader how these elements of nature play into creating a relationship in showing what ties one person to another. Strong symbolism found in the terms ‘land’ and ‘sea’ has always played an important role in Portuguese culture. For example, the poems, “O mar e tu” and “Cantiga da terra”, draw upon visual imagery of the sea and land for strength and compassion. As both poet and artist of these two poems, Dulce Pontes, a popular ‘fado’ singer in Portugal, draws upon this strength and compassion as these two powerful images help her to cope with the reality of a lost love.

As a collective work, *A Janela – The Poetic Soul* not only explores popular Portuguese poetry, prose, and narrative written through a lyrical and artistic setting, but also exemplifies what it means to be Portuguese *and* an artist. How it feels to be each artist expressing their own distinctive and personal experiences about their emotional journey through life while discovering how their past roots have helped them or hindered them into getting there.

The author, Maria Miranda Lawrence, alongside many other talented poets and musicians, brings together different genres of art creating a ‘whole being’ or ‘collective soul’ of the Portuguese people as a result. These collective works of art join the visual to the emotional in a well-written account of navigating through critical passages in Portuguese life and culture.

